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Evangelism and Feminism in China's Northwest: The Double Identities of Mildred Cable, Evangeline French and Francesca French

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines life stories of the Trio—Mildred Cable, Evangeline French and Francesca French—as missionaries of the China Inland Mission in China from 1902 to 1936, and considers how feminist ideology intersected with their evangelistic work. I argue that apart from their noted names as overseas missionaries, the Trio's lives indicated they could be regarded as feminists as well. In order to analyse the Trio's identities as feminists, I consider the historical and social backgrounds of the Trio to find out the changes of middle-class women's role in the last decades of nineteenth-century Britain before reviewing the Trio's evangelism and itineration in China. Besides, I also examine the images of Chinese women and Muslim women in northwestern China implied in the Trio's writings to understand the Trio's perspectives on the status of women in China.

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NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

The problem of romanization of Chinese characters was always an inevitable issue faced by writers and readers. Even in the 1920s, the Trio already noted the problem and wrote in one of their books, "The perennial problem of how best to convey to the English Reader the pronunciation of Chinese names has been faced by the Authors, who, in order to avoid confusion, have very regretfully adopted the system of Romanization as used by the Chinese Post Office." In stead of using the same system as the Trio, I have chosen to use the contemporary Chinese Romanization system and all Chinese places and names appear in *pinyin*. At the first time use of every name, the original one that was used by the Trio appears next to *pinyin*, such as Huozhou (Hwochow). As for names in the quotations and book titles, the original ones are retained. A glossary of Chinese place names is appended on page 100, which not only shows readers the different spellings of names but also the changes in place names since 1949.

Chapter One

From "Angel in the House" to Overseas Missionaries: the Changes of Middle-Class Women's Roles in Britain from the 1850 to the 1930

Born in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Mildred Cable, Evangeline French and Francesca French, who became well-known by the name of "the Trio," demonstrated the unprecedented change in social status and roles of middle-class single women after the middle of the nineteenth century. They were independent, ambitious, and successful. More importantly, as professionals they had obtained great achievements that even some contemporary men could not achieve. Of all the titles by which they might be known—authors, scholars, Silk Road travelers, public speakers — pioneering missionaries was the one by which the Trio were best known and the one that all their other titles were built on. Living through last decades of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century and experiencing a series of significant changes socially and ideologically, the Trio undoubtedly bore the mark of that era. In this thesis, I will attempt to explore how the feminist identity of the Trio underlay their more well-known one, as overseas missionary. I argue that the Trio's thirty-odd years in missionary work and their own lives indicate the Trio can be regarded as feminists. It can be seen from two angels. Firstly, the Trio's evangelistic work was focused on Chinese women, during which the Trio helped to improve many Chinese women's lives by providing them opportunities for education. To some extent, the Trio's work impelled the modernization of Chinese women in Huozhou, Shanxi Province. Secondly, the Trio had a clear understanding of women's status not only in Chinese society but,

more importantly, in Britain and in the mission societies. They called for recognition of women missionaries' contribution to evangelism and an equal role for women missionaries in the administration of mission societies. Furthermore, they put into practice their ideology of equality in missionary work later by taking charge of full mission service at their mission station in Suzhou, Gansu Province. At the same time, their lives as independent and professional women working overseas displayed an image of "new women" and set up a good example of single women succeeding in traditionally male-dominated positions for women in China as well as in Britain. Thus, both the Trio's behaviours and ideology of gender equality showed characteristics of feminism. Therefore, despite the absence of any claim of being feminists from the Trio or public support for any feminist movement, the Trio indicated they were feminists by their lives and achievements. Before entering the discussion on the Trio's evangelical work in China, I want to consider the social background at the time and its influence on the change of middle-class single women's roles in Britain first.

For hundreds of years being a woman of middle class in Britain had meant being fragile, dependent and subordinate. However, two significant movements that started from the mid-nineteenth century had broken the traditional British assumptions about the roles of middle-class women in British society and opened a new era of woman's history: the feminist movement and the missionary movement. In both movements, middle-class women took part actively, played an important role, and benefited a lot from the movements.

To some extent, these two movements were different expressions of similar motivation and had an influence on each other in rewriting woman's history. Both of

them indicated the demand of middle-class women to obtain more opportunities in out-of-home jobs and more rights. Comparatively speaking, the feminist movement expressed this demand more directly through a series of organized campaigns to fight for women's social, economic and legal rights. Meanwhile, under the theme of "women's work for women," the missionary movement more emphasised the help to emancipate overseas women, although it did open a total new and international arena for fulfillment of middle-class women by recruiting single women for overseas evangelism. Despite different objects and methods of two movements, in the end they both aimed to improve women's education and advocate greater civil rights for women.

Meanwhile, with the heavy involvement of women and as two concurrent significant events of the nineteenth century, the feminist movement and the missionary movement inevitably had interacted with each other. Feminists led organized campaigns to "change notions of what work women could and should do" and "gain entrance to various professions for middle-class women."[1] As one of the results of the missionary movement, women entering foreign mission fields as missionaries, which was definitely a male-dominated field before, exactly responded to the theme of the feminist movement. As a matter of fact, many women in missionary societies were involved in some feminist campaigns. For instance, church women in Britain played an important role in Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1870s. And in another case, some church women were a part in the frontal assault on traditional gender roles waged by the women's suffrage movement.[2] Therefore, it is

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[1] Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 248.

[2] Susan Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, ed. Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus (Ann Arbor: The University

necessary to probe into how the feminist movement and the missionary movement each influenced the changes in roles of middle-class women in British society.

The Feminist Movement in Britain from Mid-Victorian to the Inter-War Years

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the first women's movement in Britain. The development of modern British feminism commenced in the late eighteenth century, but organized campaigns for the emancipation of women did not begin until the 1850s and 1860s. Feminists were from the middle class with a good education, and these middle-class women also became the object group of campaigns in the early stage of the movement. As feminists, they

> challenged women's disabilities and disadvantages in education, occupations, sexual practices, and marriages, among other things; they agitated for both access to public life and justice in private life, and were especially concerned about sexual relations as a site of oppression. Feminists also challenged a set of deeply entrenched beliefs about women; that they were more not political beings; and that marriage and family were their only destiny.[3]

The most significant feature of the mid-Victorian feminist idea was "its high evaluation of women and of what they could be and do."[4] The idea reflected the demands of women, especially middle-class single women and their social background at the time. The demographic imbalance of mid-nineteenth-century Britain was known as the "Redundancy Crisis."[5] According to the 1851 English Census, 42% of the female population between the ages of 20 and 40 was unmarried, and one-third of the six

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of Michigan Press, 1999), 39-67.
[3] Ibid., 245.
[4] Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88.
[5] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 219.

million women in Britain were self-supporting.[6] The increasing numbers of single women requiring an occupation and a means of supporting themselves has long been seen as one of the underlying reasons for the rise of this movement.[7]

The demand for more opportunities for paid work from middle-class single women indicated the turning point of the transformation of women's traditional image. The image of a middle-class woman in Victorian British society was the "angel in the house."[8] She was passive, sexually innocent and dependent. Women were considered as subordinate within the family and men were imagined as benevolent protectors. Victorian scientists developed and built up various theories regarding biologically-based sexual differences on the basis of "assumptions regarding the behaviour of women in their own class." And "the theme running through Victorian Darwinistic science was that women were nearer nature (and the lower animals) than men."[9] Under the influence of such separate-spheres ideology, middle-class women, either married or single, were limited to domestic activities under the guide of many "real restrictions" on what they could do without compromising their reputations and respectability. Generally speaking, most middle-class married women spent their lives in purposeful action, maintaining their homes, raising their children, acting as 'hidden partners' in their husband's work, and engaging in their own charitable work. On account of their varied and vital contributions to family businesses and incomes, historians Leonore

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[6] Mary Poovey. *Uneven Development. the ideological work of gender in mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 4, cited in Mara Patessio, "Western Women Missionaries and their Japanese Female Charges," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (February 2007), 59-77.
[7] Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980*, 105.
[8] Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 77.
[9] Ibid., 81-2.

David and Catherine Hall have "dubbed these the 'hidden investment' in middle-class economic life."[10]

In general, middle-class women without husbands had to depend on a male member of their family for their living, and for many of them, particularly those from the lower middle class, having paid employment was a necessity if there was a lack of financial support from their family. But due to the limited professional choices open to them, life could be a misery. Before the 1860s, the suitable positions for middle-class women were usually governesses, teachers, or dressmakers. Among these, the most common work was as a governess, which was considered to "be respectable but poorly paid and meant living somewhat like a servant."[11] Even though it was a job like this, by the middle of the nineteenth century the positions of governess were far below the need of work of middle-class women. This fact became a topic of frequent discussion and one of the key reasons that stirred up the first wave of the nineteenth-century women's movement.

Although the women's movement in Britain began with a petition to reform the laws which oppressed married women and deprived them of their property, the early feminists soon turned their attention to "expanding the range of employment open to women, to improving secondary education and making higher education accessible to women, and then to the suffrage [of women]."[12] Feminists argued that women needed and were entitled to a larger public role, which then was turned into the more specific idea of removing particular restrictions from women and opening to them all the

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[10] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 43.
[11] Ibid., 48.
[12] Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980*, 88.

economic, social, and political opportunities available to men. This idea could be taken as the ultimate aim of the mid-Victorian feminist movement.

Aiming to open new spheres for women, feminists understood wisely that a sound education was a necessary preliminary.

> Women saw education as the key to a broad range of other freedoms; as a means of training for paid employment; as a means of alleviating the vacuity and boredom of everyday idleness and, of course; as the means to improving their ability to fight for the extension of female opportunities in a host of other areas.[13]

Therefore, throughout this period, the early feminists not only organized a variety of campaigns and societies, including the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women and the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women (SPEW), but also successfully established many girls' schools and several women' colleges of University rank, including Girton College, which was the first women's college at Cambridge founded by feminist Miss Emily Davies in 1867,[14] and Newnham College, which was founded by Miss Anna Clough in 1871.[15] By the 1890s, universal elementary schooling had been in existence, legally at least, for two full decades. Many new and academically competent private schools for girls had been founded, and women's colleges in the University of London and the new civic Victorian University in Manchester were awarding degrees to women.[16] Additionally, in the 1880s the profession of medicine was open to women too. Women could receive training at the women's medical colleges in London or Edinburgh, which were established by pioneer women doctors. Teacher training colleges for women were also making great advancements in legally admitting and training women.

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[13] Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 26.
[14] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 247.
[15] Ethel Snowden, *The Feminist movement* (London: Collins, 1913), 91.
[16] Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1859-1900*, 27.

The effort of feminists devoted to gaining access for women to higher education was repaid with the opening of a whole range of professional possibilities for women. Furthermore, after 1869 government departments also opened to women. Many women took local government offices in the 1870s, which became a new avenue of political participation for women.[17]

The enfranchisement of women was the most important legal right the feminist movement aimed for. With the success of repealing the Contagious Disease Acts in the 1880s,[18] feminists were encouraged by this great reward to fight for more rights. From the 1890s to World War One, it was the suffrage movement that made another breakthrough for the women's movement. In fact, the beginning of the campaign for women's formal political right to the vote in parliamentary elections could be traced back to 1819.[19] Since the 1860s several formal organizations for women's suffrage had been founded. Between 1867 and 1884 they had conducted a strenuous campaign all over the country. Suffrage bills and amendments were introduced and debated almost every year, and several more were introduced between 1884 and 1897. The major gain of the suffrage movement in the last part of the nineteenth century was the 1894 Local Government Act, which allowed married women to vote in local elections just as single

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[17] Ibid., 40.

[18] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 256. The Contagious Disease Acts was passed in 1864 and extended in 1866 because of rampant venereal disease in the military. It empowered the police in eighteen port and garrison towns to stop women they believed were prostitutes on the street, subject them to a physical examination, bring them to a magistrate, and hospitalize them if they found evidence of venereal disease. It was taken as (by feminists) an indication of government-sanctioned vice that made clear the connections between women's sexual and political subordination. The campaign was also aimed at eradicating the sexual double standard which was the most evident effect of the Acts. The campaign was extremely successful, and the Contagious Disease Acts were repealed in 1886.

[19] Snowden, *The Feminist movement*, 142.

women did (provided they owned sufficient property).[20] It was not until the passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 that the suffrage movement obtained its final victory. The Act "enfranchised women over thirty who were on the local government register or who were wives of men who were, who occupied property that had an annual rent of at least £5, or who were graduates of British universities."[21] Although there were still obstacles, the sex barrier had been finally broken. But only when another Act was passed in 1928, which gave women and men aged twenty-one or over the vote on equal terms, had women won full parliamentary voting rights.[22]

In sum, the advent of organized feminism brought one of the most important changes in women's history of nineteenth-century Britain. Feminists campaigned for society to value women for their intellectual and professional capacities and to grant legal rights to them. However, the feminist movement in the nineteenth century was just the first wave of feminists' fight for equality of gender. The nineteenth-century feminist movement did open a lot of working opportunities for women, but women's inequality in work had not been eliminated and there was still a long way to go for full equality of gender. Meanwhile, it is necessary to acknowledge that there were also other forces that contributed to the historical changes in nineteenth-century British women's social status, for instance, the process of industrialization and the growth of white-blouse and bureaucratic work which expanded women's employment opportunities, and additional help from various other movements and institutions as well.[23] All of these forces combined with the feminist movement to create opportunities for the transformation of

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[20] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 284.
[21] Ibid., 295.
[22] Ibid., 296.
[23] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914*, 298.

Victorian women from the traditional image to new, independent women. The unprecedented opportunities benefited many women, especially middle-class single women, and women's active participation helped to create a new society in which they wrote their new history.

On the other hand, while the feminist movement of nineteenth-century Britain mainly focused on the emancipation of British women, the impact of the imperial status of Victorian Britain on British feminists led them to believe that they had a special responsibility toward women in British colonies. With their imperial superiority many middle-class feminists viewed the women of the East not as equals; they believed that those unfortunate women of the East were in need of saving by their British "sisters."[24] This sense of mission was consistent with the evangelical Christian enthusiasm of British society. It was this evangelical Christian enthusiasm that evoked another significant movement of nineteenth-century Britain—the missionary movement.

The Missionary Movement and Women in Missions

Women entering the mission field and becoming missionaries could not be taken as a direct result of the feminist movement. However, similarly to the feminist movement, the missionary movement focused on advocating women entering a traditionally male-dominated professional field—overseas missionaries. In an age of imperial and evangelistic fervour, the rapid expansion of missionary activity allowed some single women to consider service overseas as an outlet for their energies and

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[24] Antoinette M. Burton, "The White Woman's Burden," in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance,* ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 137-57.

frustrations.[25] Meanwhile, it provided women a chance to pursue new roles through mission activities not only in their homeland but more importantly, in foreign lands. Although the missionary movement did not have the same strong influence on the entire British society as that of the feminist movement, it was said to "have comprised in Britain as it did in the United States the single largest social movement in which Victorian women participated."[26]

Foreign missionary activity was one of the most important ways that connected the British Empire with its vast colonies beyond. Before the mid-nineteenth century, women who participated in the "civilizing mission"[27] went overseas usually as missionary wives. Noticeably, women's involvement in missionary work was largely behind the scenes. They were explicitly the subsidiary adjuncts of their missionary husbands. Their work was acknowledged not as professional but as voluntary. Therefore, the roles they played in the foreign mission field were not as professional missionaries but as assistants to their missionary husbands. Their work was varied and endless, including teaching children, nursing the sick, delivering babies, teaching domestic arts, etc. In fact, some of the most important missionary work in the first two-thirds of the century was done by the wives of male missionaries.[28] Without their wives' attending to these more social needs of the mission's target population, their missionary husbands would not have been able to devote themselves fully to their

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[25] Cecilie Swaisland, "Wanted-Earnest, Self-Sacrificing Women for Service in South Africa: Nineteenth-Century Recruitment of Single Women to Protestant Missions," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present*, ed., Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 70- 84.

[26] Patricia R. Hill, "The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920," cited in "Missionary-Imperial Feminism", byThorne, in *Gendered Missions*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 41.

[27] Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, "Introduction: Gendered Missions at Home and Abroad," in ibid., 8.

[28] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914,* 148.

ministerial duties.[29] The female agency in foreign evangelism was stressed in some early memoirs of missionary wives. The texts suggested that "a woman could be both a supportive missionary wife and make major independent contributions to the development of girls' education; she could foster links to the indigenous community both through acting as hostess in the private sphere and through public engagements with indigenous male cultural institutions." [30] However, in spite of women's contribution to overseas evangelism, men, only men, were the dominant power of the mission society and ministers in general.

The tide began to turn after the mid-nineteenth century. Behind it were large demographic, social, and cultural forces that led women to the Christian missions as professional missionaries instead of just auxiliary missionary wives. As discussed in previous paragraphs, the industrial revolution produced prominent changes in British society economically and socially: the surplus of women in the second half of nineteenth-century Britain created the "Redundancy Crisis," and the economic changes brought by the industrial revolution made it more difficult for many middle-class families to keep grown but unmarried women at home. These pressures forced single middle-class women to move out from their homes and seek various means to support themselves. Thus, as one of the few jobs open to middle-class women, missionary work could be appealing.

At the same time, within missionary societies more and more mission organizations realized the importance of the conversion of women in the foreign field. Women were believed to be the most important influence on their entire family's

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[29] Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in *Gendered Missions*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 42.
[30] Clare Midgley, "Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire." *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45, (April 2006): 335-58.

acceptance of Christianity and the key to spreading the belief to the next generation. Additionally, for people in the most of East societies that were hostile to evangelism, women were considered as an easier access to open the door for Christianity. A small social unit as it is, the family was regarded as "the central determinant of a civilization's openness to the Gospel" and "it was women therein who held the key to heathen family's Christian potential."[31] But in some areas or countries, such as in India and China, the gender taboos prevented male missionaries from approaching local women. The female half of the population in those foreign lands was thus beyond the male missionaries' reach, and beyond the preaching of the Gospel. Without reaching the women, Christianity would no longer stand in those lands. Although missionary wives did help their husbands with missionary work and could build up some connections with local women, their other responsibilities complicated their work since "the centre of her appropriate sphere is, indeed, within the domestic circle."[32] Therefore, during the 1860s and 1870s mainstream missionary organizations began to recruit single women for missionary positions and established their own committees to oversee the dispatch of single women missionaries. To spark British women's interest in engaging in the missionary work, the mission societies reminded British women of their special responsibility to their sisters in foreign lands:

> You who are the noblest product of Christian civilisation, sheltered, honoured, loved by father, husband, son—can you be content to sit at ease in Zion whilst millions of your sisters suffer untold shame and anguish? … Nothing but the spread of the Christian ideal of womanhood will break the fetters of India's women. Can you do nothing to help?[33]

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[31] Ibid., 43.

[32] Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 11.

[33] Anon, *"Is It Nothing to You?" A Record of Work among Women in Connection with the London Missionary Society*, cited in "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," by Thorne, in *Gendered Missions*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 44.

As one of the many employment opportunities opened to single middle-class women in the last decades of the nineteenth century, missionary work received their response on a large scale. Compared to other paid-employment opportunities, the missionary service "demanded a life commitment and paid for that commitment with a guarantee of modest economic security, opportunity for achievement abroad and renown at home."[34] From missionary service women could acquire practical training and administrative skills, and have opportunities for independent action. Playing an active part in public life and exerting some influence on "civilizing" their sisters in foreign lands endowed middle-class women with an entirely new role that was far different from their traditional roles of mother and wife. In addition, as missionaries women were granted the right to engage in activities that were traditionally in the hands of men, such as "to act collectively, handle money, organize meetings," and most important of all, "to speak in public on behalf of the cause."[35] Besides the other reasons that women chose to become missionaries, women used missionary service in many ways, not just as "an outlet for their specifically religious zeal, energy, and creativity" but also as "the means to fulfill themselves in much broader ways by putting their own abilities to work."[36] In a word, the opportunities and challenges in the foreign mission lands opened up a different arena for women seeking outdoor working positions and the possibility of fulfilling their capabilities in a different social circumstance.

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[34] Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility,* 35-6.
[35] Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in *Gendered Missions*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 49.
[36] Line Nyhagen Predelli and Jon Miller, "Piety and Patriarchy: Contested Gender Regimes in Nieteenth-Century Evangelical Missions," in ibid., 67-111.

By the end of the nineteenth century the number of women in the entire missionary population had gone from none to almost half of it,[37] and by the early decades of the twentieth century women outnumbered men on the mission field by a ratio of more than two to one.[38] With such a high ratio in the mission population, women played a prominent part both in home-front support efforts and in overseas missionary work. Fund-raising was a major way in which women of the mission society at home gave their support to overseas missionary work. By the end of the nineteenth century British women were contributing more than 70 percent of the funding for foreign missionary operations.[39] As for female missionaries, they were more often sent to places where missions were not quite successful or places with strict gender taboos, such as India, the Middle East, and the Far East. Further, women often played crucial roles in pioneering new regions or in developing new programs.[40]

Women's contributions to the foreign mission field were built up at a high cost. For women missionaries and missionary wives in foreign lands, although they had new opportunities that could not be found at home, they faced many more challenges. Health was a major factor for both women and men. Without the benefit of good medical care or family support like at home, pregnancy and childbirth were more risky, and rearing young children healthily became a great challenge. Since women bore the burden of pregnancies and the duties of domestic affairs, and women suffered more health problems. Stress was another problem. The pressure from the sponsoring societies for success stories of "heathen converts" and rapid growth was huge, whereas their concern

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[37] Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914,* 148.
[38] Ruth A. Tucker, *Guardian of the Great Commission: the Story of Women in Modern Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 2.
[39] Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in *Gendered Missions,* ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 41.
[40] Tucker, *Guardian of the Great Commission,* 2.

for the missionary's expenditure of time, health, and energy often showed little.[41] In addition, there were many other stresses in missionary life that sometimes could bring missionaries to the edge of breakdown, such as a "shift in physical environment, adaptation to another culture, working in another language, living in two worlds, facing rapid change, dealing with nationals, relations with fellow missionaries, the possibilities for criticisms to become condemnation, need for recognition and status, engaging in significant work and maintaining family life."[42] As far as women missionaries and missionary wives were concerned, these stresses had a more serious effect on their work and lives. Nevertheless, even though there were such health and stress challenges, more and more British women were still attracted to missionary work and joined actively in the crusade where they could find new and rewarding spheres of activities that would not be open to them at home.

Therefore, it is clear that the quest for women's rights and the expansion of new opportunities for fulfillment of women's potentiality were common characteristics of both the missionary movement and the feminist movement in nineteenth-century Britain. However, although both the feminist movement and the missionary movement exerted significant influence on middle-class women of nineteenth-century Britain, it is obvious that the most outstanding characteristic of the missionary movement, compared to feminist's efforts for women's rights in the feminist movement, was that it was the need of evangelization of women overseas and the superior agency of women missionaries in overseas evangelism that impelled foreign missionary societies to open the missionary positions to women. On the other hand, without the impact of the feminist movement

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[41] Fiona Bowie, "Introduction: Reclaiming Women's Presence," in *Women and Missions,* ed., Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener, 7.
[42] Ibid., 8.

against the Victorian ideology on women, the missionary movement could not win wide-scale support and the foreign missionary societies could not successfully recruit so many middle-class single women as they did. At the same time, the feminist movement's propaganda on the emancipation of women was also implied in the theme of the missionary movement—"women's work for women." Furthermore, as a movement that had drawn on quite broad support groups across the whole empire and through its missionary propaganda, the missionary movement of the Britain was able to "ensure that missionary figures were not only well known to contemporaries, but also provided respected exemplars for Victorian society."[43] Thus, female missionaries and their presentation within the missionary movement helped to establish "the ideal of feminine competence capable of undertaking nationally esteemed activities."[44] This ideal exactly embodied the spirit of the feminist movement. From this point of view the missionary movement identified its cause with the feminist movement in Britain.

While that women entered traditionally male-dominated fields was clearly a prominent advancement of British society, it did not mean that women's subordinate status had been completely changed. As far as the missionary movement was concerned, even though women's large-scale involvement in the overseas missionary effort made a significant contribution to the evangelism of mission societies, women had little influence within those societies. Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, women still had no equal voice with men in setting mission policies. For instance, the General Committee of the Church Missionary Society did not allow women to sit on the

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[43] Judith Rowbotham, "'Soldiers of Christ'? Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom," *Gender & History,* Vol. 12, no. 1, (April 2000): 82-106.
[44] Ibid., 83.

committee until 1917.[45] In most mission societies women's status was still viewed in a traditionally Victorian way, as primarily dependent and always under the ultimate control of men. Beyond all doubt, women's influence in most mission societies did not grow as strong as their numbers.

As far as the agency of women missionaries was concerned, there are various opinions among historians. Susan Thorne considers women missionaries' overseas evangelism among their "heathen sisters" as "missionary imperial feminism," stressing that the evangelism depended on the subordination of women in British colonies or other mission lands.[46] From another viewpoint, some scholars have emphasised the influence of women missionaries had on the development of feminist consciousness of the "heathen women" they worked among. Jane Hunter argued that while women missionaries found the mission field offered them unexpected authority and opportunities, their own example, rather than their missionary agenda, constituted their most significant contribution.[47] When Kwok Pui-Lan discussed the influence of women missionaries in her study of Chinese women and Christianity, she argued that missionary women should not be regarded as saints or villains but as "human beings caught up in an historical drama that was beyond their control and that produced results they had not intended."[48]

As for the ministry of the Trio, there are only a few scholars who have studied it. Among them, Linda Benson is the most important one, having published a book and

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[45] Peter Williams, "'The Missing Link': The Recruitment of Women Missionaries in some English Evangelical Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century," in *Women and Missions,* ed., Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener, 43-70.
[46] Thorne, "Missionary Imperialism Feminism," in *Gendered Mission*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 60.
[47] Hunter, *The Gospel of the Gentility*, 51, 26.
[48] Kwok Pui-Pan, *Chinese Women and Christianity 1860-1921* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 22-3.

several articles on the lives of the Trio. She called the Trio "missionaries with attitude."[49] Benson stresses the Trio's contribution as pioneering missionaries to bring the Christian message not only to the people of China but also to China's Muslims and their endeavours for the advancement of women's status both within the Christian movement as well as in British and Chinese secular society.[50] In his study of the China Inland Mission, Alvyn Austin considered the Trio as "the most famous of the semi-independent missionaries" and thought they took "the Shanxi spirit" to Central Asia.[51]

However, the topic of the Trio is still virtually unstudied among Chinese scholars who have studied missionary work in China. There are some scholars studying the evangelization of Muslims in China. Xu Bingsan argues in his article on evangelism among China's Muslims that the evangelization of Muslims in China was not successful overall, but the evangelism helped two religious cultures' communication and interaction.[52] Similar to Xu's opinion, Fang Jianchang, who studied evangelism among Muslims in northwestern China, stresses that due to the small number of converts, the evangelization of Muslims in northwestern China was unsuccessful. He argues, however, that western missionaries did lots of work to help Muslims in famine relief, , irrigation work and education, which alleviated their sufferings and won amity from Muslims.[53] There are also very few Chinese studies on women missionaries Chinese

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[49] Linda Benson, "Missionaries with Attitude: A Women's Mission in Northwestern China," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 2005): 183-8.

[50] Linda Benson, *Across China's Gobi: The Lives of Evangeline French, Mildred Cable, and Francesca French of the China Inland Mission* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2008), 242, 244.

[51] Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 431.

[52] Xu Bingsan, "Cong *Jiaowu Zazhi* kan jindai xifang chuanjiaoshi dui Zhongguo musilin de chuanjiao huodong" (Western Protestant missionaries' efforts to convert Chinese Muslims in the early twentieth Century: as seen in the pages of *The Chinese Recorder*), *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* (Guizhou ethnic studies), Vol. 26, No. 108, (2006): 138-44.

[53] Fang Jianchang, "Jindai xifang Jidujiao chuanjiaoshi zai Zhonguo xibei shaoshu minzu zhong de

scholars generally hold the opinion that women missionaries' work had a great impact on emancipation of Chinese women, especially education of Chinese girls and women. Most Chinese historians think that the influence of women missionaries was more positive than negative for modern China.[54] Some scholars have argued that western missionaries played an important role in spreading western female thoughts in Modern China.[55] Therefore, the secondary references for my study on the Trio mainly rely on Benson and a few other historians' works on the Trio as well as women missionaries more generally. Also, due to scarcity of primary sources for the study, the thesis has to depend heavily on the Trio's own writings about their evangelism in Huozhou and northwestern China. Meanwhile, some articles from *China's Millions*, *The China Mission Year Book* and *The Chinese Recorder* also contribute to evaluating the Trio's missionary work in China.

The China Inland Mission and its Policy on Equality of Gender

Among all mission societies, the China Inland Mission (hereafter CIM) was the one that realized the importance of women in evangelism and became one of the earliest societies that recruited single women for overseas evangelism. From its founding in 1865 the CIM grew to become the single largest Protestant organization in China, reaching a membership of 1,000 active missionaries in 1900. The CIM was different

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chuanjiao huodong ji youguan wenxian gaishu" (Overview of the activities and related sources of modern Western Protestant missionaries among the minorities peoples of China's northwest), *Xibei minzu yanjiu* (Northwestern minorities studies) Vol. 14, No. 1, (1994): 106-16.

[54] Liang Yuhong, "Jia'nada Zhanglaohui nu chuanjiaoshi zai jindai yu bei diqu de huodong ji yingxiang" (The missionary work by female missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of Canada and its influence in northern Henan during the early twentieth Century), *Lishi jiaoxue* (History teaching), Vol. 537, No. 10, (2007): 34-8.

[55] Gu Zhongyu, "Chuanjiaoshi yu xifang nuxingguan zai Zhongguo de chuanbo" (Missionaries and the spread of western female thoughts in China), *Beijing Ligong Daxue xuebao: shehui kexue ban* (Journal of Beijing Institute of Technology, social sciences edition) , Vol. 4, No.3, (August 2002): 44 - 6.

from other mission groups from its inception since it was interdenominational with membership open to all Protestants.[56] For Hudson Taylor, the founder of the CIM, God empowered men and women by his Holy Spirit to do his work whether or not they had formal status and qualifications.[57] Hudson Taylor also broke the normal missionary custom by being willing to accept people who were less educated, since he believed that the primary qualification needed for evangelism was spiritual. Not only did Hudson Taylor recruit single women to go overseas, he also treated women, both married and single, as equal members with men (except in administration). The CIM was one of the first mission societies to include the equal partnership of men and women as a major policy, and this was reaffirmed in 1883.[58] In spite of powerful opposition from other missionary communities, Hudson Taylor never gave up his belief in the equality of women's ability in evangelism. The next decade saw a remarkably high proportion of single women among the missionaries of the CIM. By 1888, single women comprised 120 out of 329 CIM missionaries, while the total number of women missionaries was 181, which meant 55 per cent of CIM missionaries were women and if the missionary wives were not counted as missionaries (as they were not in other societies) 45 per cent were single women by then.[59]

On the other hand, even with such a positive policy on the equality of women with men in the CIM, the leadership of the mission was not open to women. Despite the great contributions of women and the equality of gender advocated in the mission,

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[56] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 7.
[57] Ibid., 46.
[58] Ibid., 4.
[59] Williams, "'The Missing Link': The Recruitment of Women Missionaries in some English Evangelical Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century," in *Women and Missions,* ed., Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener, 50.

Hudson Taylor still held the assumption (on Biblical grounds) that leadership must be male exclusively, both in the mission and in the church. However, as the mission grew and more single women joined, Hudson Taylor believed that the equality of women should be expanded more broadly. Later, he insisted that when the work was discussed at both local and provincial levels, women should be recognized as equals. In addition, as the work expanded "all missionaries met at Provincial Conferences for fellowship and discussion of the work, and both men and women who were senior Missionaries with five years experience in China, could be chosen to represent their district in discussion with the Superintendent, and also as an advisory Council to the Superintendent at Provincial level."[60] Nevertheless, when it came to the mission administration level, it was hard for women to enter the leadership field. This subordinate status still could not be broken thoroughly, even in a mission society like the CIM.

1912 was a milestone for an agreement reached among most of the missionary societies in Britain, acknowledging women's contributions over the past decades, the importance of recruiting women for evangelism, the equality of women with men in mission work, and the necessity of involving women in the leadership of missions. In this year, the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland produced a seventy-page report on the subject of "Men and Women in Mission Administration" and stressed the complementary function of men and women together, their equality, and the need for both to co-operate for maximum efficiency in missions.[61] It called on

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[60] The Arrangements of the China Inland Mission (Shanghai: China Inland Mission, 1886), cited by Valerie Griffiths in "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1920-1990" (Regent College, 1996), 6.

[61] Ibid., 15.

the Church to give women an opportunity to exercise their gifts and urged that men and women should work together with no ignorance or prejudice existing:

> In other callings women have already been proved in common administrative service. Departments of States, Royal Commissions, University Senates, Boards of Education, Municipal Councils have provided scope for men and women to work side by side in administrative work… [but] in the administration of the various forms of service of the Church, and in particular of the missionary enterprise, the place of women side by side with Men is not yet the accepted one.[62]

While over the following ten years many missionary societies took action as a response to the 1912 Report and included women among their representatives sent to the conference of the British Missionary Societies, the CIM never did. However, the issue of women's contribution to evangelism and allowing women into the administrative structures became perennial topics in the CIM conferences and Home Councils from then on. The topic of women's contribution to the mission was first raised at the meeting of the China Council in November 1921 when an Auxiliary Ladies' Council was suggested by Jessie Gregg. But the China Council rejected the idea of a Ladies' Council in China, whether it was for advice or administration.[63] It was the National Christian Conference of the CIM in 1922 that placed the topic on the agenda. The Minutes of the China Council state that the correspondence from women missionaries on the issue revealed "a desire on the part of our sisters that means should be found for their point of view and work being more adequately brought to the notice of the Administration."[64] It was also recorded that "the Council sympathized with their desire." But instead of an Auxiliary Ladies' Council, the China Council proposed that it would be better to invite some ladies to join the China Council. It indicated that the

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[62] *Missionary Report* (1912), in ibid., 16.
[63] China Council Minutes (11 November 1921), in ibid., 32.
[64] China Council Minutes (22 April 1922), in ibid., 33.

China Council was willing to make a major change in the Mission structure of the CIM. Nevertheless, such a change could not be made without consulting the Home Councils. The Home Councils included the London Council, the North American Council, and the Australian Council. The results of the discussion on the China Council's proposal in the Home Councils were quite different. The North American Council felt that "it was probable that this could be obtained in some other way than the one in mind"[65] and reached an agreement of disapproval. The London Council discussed the subject in January of 1923 and the details recorded in the Minutes from the London Council indicated the opinion that

> It would be well to invite single ladies to join the China Council; that as the step proposed involved a distinctly new departure in the practice of the Mission and that it also had an obvious bearing upon the Home Councils, Mr. Hoste was waiting to hear the opinion of the Home Directors and Councils before reaching a final conclusion. The Council fully agreed with the suggestion forwarded by the China Council and the Secretary was requested to inform Mr. Hoste of this decision immediately.[66]

While the London Council had approved of the motion, the Australian Council had divergence of opinion amongst its members. In such circumstances the China Council felt that "it would be neither wise nor right to proceed in this matter at the present time."[67] But it did not mean that the topic was dropped. As a matter of fact, D. E. Hoste, who was the General Director of the CIM and chaired the China Council, kept on working on it. The topic appeared again at the China Council in December 1925 and the sessions on this issue offered a proposal that

> Six sisters be selected from an auxiliary group to sit with the Council in consideration of larger subjects and problems common to the service of men and women workers alike. The general practice of the Council had been to consider such matters at the December session. Inasmuch as women already have a share in nominating

[65] Minutes of the Toronto Council (December 1922), in ibid., 64.
[66] The London Council Minutes (10 January 1923), in ibid., 66.
[67] China Council Minutes (9 July 1923), in ibid., 67.

> Superintendents, it was felt that it would be better that the auxiliary group should be co-opted. The selection of the group would, in accordance with the practice in the case of Superintendents, be made for a period of three years.[68]

Although this proposal allowed women to attend the Council, the limited number of women representatives implied that they would hardly exert any influence on the policy-making of the Council. Therefore, the proposal was still far from the desire of women's equality in administration structure. In the years 1927, 1938 and 1943, the contribution of women and the matter of women serving on the China Council were raised again in the sessions of the China Council. The Minutes of the Council in 1943 recorded that

> It was emphasised that, while certain women might have gifts that would make them valuable members of the China Council, there was no thought of the appointment of women Superintendents.[69]

Consequently, after twenty-two years of discussion in the China Council and despite the remarkable contribution of women, gender was still an insuperable barrier for women missionaries of the CIM to obtain equality at the administration level of the mission. Nevertheless, the constant reappearance of the topic indicates that some leaders in the China Council recognized it and were willing to make a change for women members' benefit. But obviously the male-dominated Council as a whole was not ready for such a change and the priority of unity finally denied women's right to be involved in policy making in the mission.

For the women members of the CIM, the denial of their access to the China Council no doubt deprived them of opportunities to contribute at administration levels and better representing the widespread work among women. However, in spite of the

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[68] China Council Minutes (December 1925), in ibid., 68.
[69] China Council Minutes, Chungking, (29 October 1943), in ibid., 155.

fact that 52% of participants were women in the 1922 CIM Conference, implying the active involvement of women members, the result of consulting the majority of CIM women by Hoste at Mission Conferences of 1927 in Chefoo,[70] Shanghai and Tientsin demonstrated that a majority of CIM women turned down the suggestion that women should attend the China Council. The internal organ of the mission, *Monthly Notes*, reported in June 1928 that

> As a result of expressions of opinion from lady workers, both in the homeland and in China, on the proposal that women should have a seat on the China Council, there was a preponderating weight of opinion against it: the proportion of those opposed to the proposal being more than two and a half times greater than that of those in favour. In these circumstances it has been decided that prolongation of discussion in this matter is unadvisable, and that it should therefore be closed.[71]

This result reflected the fact that although women missionaries criticised the patriarchy of China and contributed to the emancipation of Chinese women they had a different assumption of the relationship roles for men and women in British society. According to this assumption, women should be submissive not only to their husbands but also to all men in their society and gender inequality was considered to be reasonable. As a matter of fact, this assumption was popular among most women missionaries in other mission societies too and originated from the traditional convention of women's subordination. And the contrast of the advantages that British women enjoyed to the "heathen" patriarchy of women in foreign lands overshadowed the inequality of British women in their homeland. Therefore, it is clear that the exclusion of women missionaries in administration structure of the CIM resulted not only from the rejection of its male members but also from the resistance of many of its women missionaries themselves.

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[70] China Council Minutes (October 1927), in ibid., 69.
[71] *Monthly Notes* (June 1928), in ibid., 70.

The Trio: From Middle-Class Single Women to Overseas Missionaries

Although the CIM did not grant full equality to its female members, as the largest mission society in China with its open policy of recruiting women, it attracted many female candidates from the middle and upper classes. Among them were Alice Mildred Cable, who came from a middle-class family, and Evangeline French and Francesca French, who were from an upper-class family. They became better known as "the Trio." The Trio were not born to be missionaries. All three had been well-educated and grew up in wealthy British families. Their choices of being overseas missionaries were results of the combination of social changes in the last decades of nineteenth-century Europe and their personal ambitions.

Mildred Cable was born on February 21 of 1878 in a British upper middle-class family. Her early years had been "orderly, settled, and deep-dyed in the British way of Life."[72] At the age of twelve, Mildred became a Christian. Despite her parents' disagreement, she indulged herself in reading missionary books and some stirring tales of Christian martyrdom, attended special meetings held by missionaries, paid visits to the Candidates' Department of the CIM, and then spent six months in the CIM training-home.[73] Her faith "fastened on to those Christian martyrdom stories of burning enthusiasms, and she mentally dramatised all the thrilling incidents of those heroic lives, in imagination walking boldly to the stake with her beloved heroine Cecilia, the Christian martyr."[74] Her enthusiasm and determination forced her parents to give up their opposition and accept the fact that Mildred was to be a missionary. After studying

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[72] William James Platt, *Three Women: Mildred Cable, Francesca French, Evangeline French* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 32.
[73] Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Something Happened* (London: Hodder & Stroughton Limited, 1938), 65, 69.
[74] Ibid., 63.

under a well-known professor and taking advanced Physics and Chemistry courses, she turned into a qualified chemist at the end of the nineteenth century when few girls studied science. Meanwhile, Mildred still made time for most activities of the Student Volunteer Movement and thrilled in the weekly Bible study group. As far as Mildred Cable's belief at the time was concerned, "service for Christ in every department was its greatest joy."[75] However, the Boxer Uprising in China in 1900 seemed to have closed the door of Mildred's missionary dream in the Far East. As it turned out, the political situation in China was changed for the better not long after and by the autumn of 1901 it was considered safe to sail for China for Mildred and other young women of the CIM.[76] She joined Evangeline French's evangelism in Shanxi (Shansi) in the following year and a fifty-year friendship began.

Different from Mildred Cable's family, Evangeline (Eva) and Francesca French' home was "a place of healthy independence of spirit."[77] Although born in 1871 in Medea of Algeria and in 1874 in Bruges of Belgium respectively, Eva and Francesca spent their teenage years first in France and then in Geneva when their family moved to Switzerland for the sake of the children's education. In the Trio's book *Something Happened*, it describes French's home as "acquaintances multiplied, and gradually all kinds of interesting people came to use the house for purposes of discussion, conversation and debate."[78] Having grown up in such a free atmosphere in Geneva, Eva had an energetic, adventurous, rebellious and insubordinate character as well as great curiosity about the outside world. It was not until 1890 when she was 19 years old that

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[75] Ibid., 74.
[76] Ibid., 75, 76.
[77] Platt, *Three Women*, 12.
[78] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 15.

Eva became a Christian. A conversation with an American woman, who was fresh from the Far East and had been a teacher in a girls' school in China, left a deep impression on Eva. She learned "the loneliness of women and their position in Asia; concubinage, foot-binding, and cheap child-life in Shanghai, then a city of half a million population, destined to become six millions"; and above all, "the need for somebody to do something to help Chinese women and children- something personal, direct, self-giving."[79] From then on, she longed for her own fulfilment. The insight and the sympathy to the misery of human society and the eagerness to help people out of tragic condition brought Eva to an unprecedented connection with God. After the family moved to Britain, she went to the worst streets of her church's neighbourhood as a visitor and worked hard at a Children's Beach Mission. Then she set her eyes on the mission to China, and the CIM was the name that attracted her eyes. Her two-year training in the Deaconess House, Liverpool, arranged by the CIM, went well except for being excused from medical training in a Liverpool hospital due to her health.[80] It was also because of concern over her health that some of the CIM leaders were against her service in China. At this juncture, Dr. Hudson Taylor stepped in and assumed the responsibility of accepting and sending Eva to North China,[81] where the climate was more favourable for her health. In September of 1893, Eva sailed to China. After six months of language study in the China Inland Mission's Women's Language School in Yangzhou, Eva was sent to the dry northern province of Shanxi. Her Chinese language made great progress when she began her missionary work, which included visiting the

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[79] Platt, *Three Women,* 16.
[80] Linda K. Benson, *Across China's Gobi: the Lives of Evangeline French, Mildred Cable, and Francesca French of the China Inland Mission* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2008), 18.
[81] Ibid., 99.

village women at their homes. Increasingly, she became known as a sympathetic listener and wise counsellor. However, the Boxer Uprising's outbreak ended Eva's seven years of service in China. After fifty days of miserable hardship, she and her party travelled across China and arrived in Hankou. As her first furlough was already due, Eva sailed for Britain. [82]

As for Francesca French, for years she was the one staying at home to take care of their family and was the staff on which her mother leaned. When her mother died in 1905, Francesca was thirty-four years old and faced a point of decision about her future.[83] After a holiday in the country, she undertook some nursing training in a hospital and later took a course in midwifery. When Eva and Mildred were back in Britain on their furlough in 1908, with what Francesca had learnt from them about the claims of China and the need of women there she knew what her decision should be. Although she was beyond the age limit, with her good health she was admitted by the council of the CIM and allowed to go to China with Mildred and Eva in 1909 when their furlough was over. [84] Thus, the Two became "the Trio."

The Trio's journey to become overseas missionaries implied the impact of the feminist movement and the missionary movement on single women of the British middle class. Open-minded upper-class parents like the Frenches more easily accepted the new ideology of gender and did not limit their daughters in the home sphere and gave them opportunities to receive higher education. Meanwhile, traditional middle-class families like Mildred Cable's were less comfortable with allowing their daughters to pursue a career, although Mildred's parents yielded to her determination in the end.

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[82] Ibid., 31.
[83] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 102.
[84] Ibid., 113.

On the other hand, the Trio showed great enthusiasm and ambition to obtain their own fulfillment through being overseas missionaries, which exactly indicated the demands of middle-class single women at the time. With their energetic, ambitious, independent, and adventurous characters, the Trio were destined to accomplish things that few of their contemporaries could emulate.

Conclusion

To return to where we began, it is clear that the nineteenth-century feminist movement helped to release middle-class single women from the traditional roles in Victorian Britain and the missionary movement expanded their opportunities of work to encompass foreign lands. Both of the movements were examined to demonstrate their influences ideologically and socially on the middle-class single women of Britain. The nineteenth-century feminist movement made it possible for middle-class single women to be independent of their families. However, comparatively speaking, the rights of women obtained from the nineteenth-century feminist movement were quite limited and the "equality" of women in their new roles only existed in a superficial way. But the missionary movement created the unprecedented opportunity of working overseas for middle-class single women with much more freedom and the possibility of fulfilment of their abilities and ambition.

As our exploration of the CIM's policy on gender shows, women missionaries were still subordinate in status and some of them were unconscious of the inequality that existed in mission work. In general, as beneficiaries of the nineteenth-century feminist movement, middle-class single women, who were always indispensable to the

missionary movement, not only actively participated in the activities of the mission either as supporters or as missionaries, but also applied their ideology of women to the evangelical objects in overseas evangelism. "Women's work for women" indicated exactly that the evangelization of women in foreign lands was the main target of British women involved in overseas evangelism, and women missionaries took the salvation and emancipation of their "sisters" as their responsibilities. The efforts of women missionaries for the emancipation of their "sisters" in foreign lands from patriarchy and their concern for their freedom and rights indicated the feminism part of their ideology on gender. Meanwhile, the contrast between their own life and that of the local women among whom they worked only helped to cover up the inequality of British women in their own society and highlight the rights that local women did not have. Thus, the missionary movement can be regarded as a movement that helped modern British middle-class single women to build an image of independent, ambitious, competent and dedicated new women, while lessening their feminist consciousness of breaking the male dominance that still existed in their work.

At the same time, the fact that the majority of women missionaries of the CIM opposed the proposal to add women to the Council and that many women missionaries neglected their own inequality was not contradictory to the success of the nineteenth-century feminist movement in changing the roles of middle-class women in Britain. On the one hand, it implied that it was impossible for the feminist movement to get rid of the traditional ideology of gender in a short time. Although the nineteenth-century feminist movement did change the roles of middle-class women in Britain, the full equality of gender in every aspect of society still needed a quite long time to obtain. On

the other hand, it indicated the different images that women missionaries had of themselves and of their "sisters" in foreign lands. As to this difference, the traditional assumptions about oriental women in western countries as well as the superiority of westerners to the Oriental in the nineteenth century both played important parts. Therefore, as far as women missionaries working in the Orient were concerned, whether they could break their original assumptions and have a new knowledge of oriental women not only determined what kind of images of oriental women they would introduce to their contemporaries at home but also could affect how they perceived their own status in their own societies and the relationship between the sexes in general.

As for the Trio, as beneficiaries of the feminist movement and the missionary movement, their life stories of being overseas missionaries could best exemplify the expanded opportunities brought to middle-class single women at the turn of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, from their initial evangelical motivations of going to China, it is not hard to see that the salvation of Chinese women was their initial purpose of evangelism. Living in the last decades of nineteenth-century Britain meant that their ideologies of the Oriental were inevitably influenced by the mainstream of British assumptions. Therefore, I assume that their original assumptions about Chinese women would be changed after their thirty-odd years of evangelism among Chinese women, and their evangelism was more than a salvation of Oriental women.

Chapter Two

"Women's Work for Women": The Trio's Evangelism among Chinese Women in Huozhou Before 1923

Like most women missionaries at the time, the evangelical objective of Evangeline French and Mildred Cable, with Francesca French who joined them seven years later, were mainly Chinese girls and women in Huozhou (Hwochow) of Shanxi Province. The Trio's original knowledge of Chinese women came from stories told by missionaries back on furlough and were also profoundly influenced by the imperial assumptions about oriental women in the nineteenth-century Britain.

In the nineteenth century, the relationship between Occident and Orient, just as Edward Said indicated in *Orientalism*, was "a relation of power, of domination, of varying degrees of hegemony."[85] Convictions of superiority were deeply rooted in the British imperial ethos of which conviction of racial supremacy was the most familiar ingredient.[86] With this superiority dominant, the general ideologies of British people on the East carried ostensible biases that matched its subordinate status. The clichéd descriptions of Chinese women were as sufferers of footbinding, patriarchy, child marriage, infanticide, illiteracy, and polygamy. In this circumstance, as privileged women of Britain, women missionaries were likely to be described as ambassadors for the salvation of Chinese women. This kind of ideology is what Susan Thorne has termed "Missionary Imperial Feminism":

> The entire edifice of missionary 'feminism'—the employment opportunities, the

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[85] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.
[86] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 37.

> valorization of (British) women's skills and virtues, the institutional and social space for self-assertion, collective action, and aggressive challenging of male prerogatives—rested on the existence of a degraded female Other in the colonies and at home.[87]

The privileges of British women only helped the difference between "heathen" women and the British women much more to stand out. On the other hand, the evident contrast helped to conceal the inequality of British women in their own society. Therefore, many missionary feminists tended to neglect the patriarchy in Britain while working on the salvation and emancipation of their "sisters" in other lands.

Being missionaries in China in the early part of twentieth century, the Trio obviously enjoyed the privileges listed above. However, instead of regarding them as Missionary Imperial feminists or Missionary feminists, I insist that they can be best regarded just as feminists apart from their missionary identities. As Kumari Jayawardena discussed in *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, the meaning of "feminism" has been expanded to mean "an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society, and conscious action by women (and men) to change this situation."[88] Moreover, as historian Karen Offen has argued, any persons, female or male, to be considered as feminists have three criteria to meet:

> (a) They recognize the validity of women's own interpretations of their lived experience and needs and acknowledge the values women claim publicly as their own (as distinct from aesthetic ideal of womanhood invented by men) in assessing their status in society relative to men; (b) they exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at or even anger over institutional injustice (or inequity) towards women as a group by men as a group in a given society; and (c) they advocate the elimination of that injustice by challenging, through efforts to alter prevailing ideas and/or social institutions and practices, the coercive power, force or authority that upholds male prerogatives in that particular culture.[89]

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[87] Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in *Gendered Mission*, ed. Huber and Lutkehaus, 60.

[88] Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), 2.

[89] Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, ed., Gisela Bock and Susan James (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 70-88.

Therefore, according to the above definitions, the Trio can be considered feminists. This does not mean that the Trio's evangelism bore no influence from the popular British assumptions about Chinese women and China. Edward Said argued that there was no method that could detach a scholar "from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society."[90] This applies also to woman missionaries, including the Trio, from an imperial context. However, the interaction between their original assumptions and their own experience in China could exert influence on their evangelism and acknowledgement of Chinese women as well. This chapter is about the Trio's twenty-year evangelism in Huozhou of Shanxi Province and aims demonstrate the Trio's feminist identity by analyzing their work for Chinese women, their efforts for equality in the CIM, and the images of Chinese women in their writings.

Preaching the Gospel and Educating Women

The missionary work of the Trio in Huozhou of Shanxi Province could be divided mainly into two parts: preaching the Gospel and educating the women. Although there was medical service involved, it will be discussed as a part of the above two categories. As one of the provinces to which women missionaries of the CIM had been sent to initiate mission work in the heartland of China,[91] Shanxi Province had a good foundation of Christianity. Therefore, although Eva French and Mildred Cable

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[90] Said, *Orientalism*, 10.
[91] Kwok Pui-Pan, *Chinese Women and Christianity 1860-1921* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 19.

faced the mess left from the Boxer Rising when they arrived in Huozhou in 1902, the next twenty years saw the expansion of the mission compound and increases in the number of church members as well as female students in the newly built schools.

However, as missionaries working in China, mastering the language (Mandarin in the case of the Trio) was a must. The CIM had a strict stipulation which required all CIM missionaries to speak and read Chinese. All members were required to take formal examinations in Chinese, the most important and demanding ones of which were the exams for junior and senior missionary certification. The principles of the CIM indicated that if a person was unable to "cope with learning the language" he/she could be granted a longer probation or be allowed to retire.[92] For the newly arrived young women, their first stay always was the CIM Women's Language School in Yangzhou (Yangchow) for their Chinese-language studies. When Eva arrived in 1893, she stayed in this language school for six months before being assigned to her first mission station.[93] Eva received her junior certification in 1896. As for Mildred, there is no detailed account of her first months in China in their autobiography. But as Linda Benson discussed in *Across China's Gobi*, there was a high possibility that she, like other newly arrived missionaries, studied Chinese for a while in the CIM Women's Language School in Yangzhou.[94] The strategy that Eva decided for Mildred, that she should live for a time with a Chinese family that knew no English, helped her to master the language effectively and quickly. Within a few years, Mildred passed the examinations required by the CIM and was granted her junior certification in 1904 and then her senior certification in 1907. Also, Francesca studied Chinese after her arrival

[92] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 9-10.
[93] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 40.
[94] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 34.

and received her junior missionary certification on October 5, 1911, based on her success in the language examinations required by the CIM.[95] The successes of obtaining the missionary certifications indicated that all three of them had mastered the abilities of reading and speaking Chinese.

Lying in the center of Shanxi Province, Huozhou was a key city connecting northeastern and northwestern China. However, flourishing and busy with considerable population from all over the country as Huozhou was, it was a city barren of Christianity until the last decades of the nineteenth century. Rather than western missionaries, it was Pastor Xi (Hsi), a former Confucian scholar converted to Christianity, who made the first efforts to spread the Gospel. Not only did he turn his home into a centre of Christian activities which he called "the Middle Eden" but he also set up refuges for opium patients which combined medical treatment with preaching of the Gospel. Not long after his establishing opium refuges, there were twenty people calling themselves Christians.[96] Nevertheless, the preaching among women had not begun. Knowing very well the immense power and significant influence women had in Chinese family life, Pastor Xi raised the issue of providing women missionaries for Huozhou when he had a visit from Hudson Taylor. With the promise of help from Hudson Taylor, Pastor Xi greeted two Norwegian ladies offered the post in Huozhou by the CIM by the end of that year, 1886.[97]

The arrival of women missionaries opened the door for the evangelization of Chinese women in Huozhou. They preached on the street to the mixed congregations,

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[95] Ibid., 21, 41, 49.
[96] Mildred Cable, *The Fulfilment of A Dream of Pastor Hsi's: the Story of the Work in Hwochow* (London: Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1917), 19.
[97] Ibid., 20.

had services in the church, and travelled from village to village to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, they also noticed the importance of reaching children and opened a small school for daughters of local Christians. The work they had done undoubtedly laid a foundation for following missionaries' evangelism in the future. But the year 1900 broke off this encouraging mission work and brought tragedy to the mission societies in China. In Huozhou station a party of fourteen people consisting of women and children, Chinese and Europeans, escaped from the city and made for Hankou of Hubei Province; among them was Eva French, who took her furlough and went back to England.

When Eva returned to Huozhou with Mildred joining her evangelical work in 1902, restoring the Chinese Church was the first task they faced, which included repairing the damaged mission quarters and renewing the work of evangelism. Once the plan for rebuilding was in place, Eva and Mildred began a period of itineration in the neighbouring villages. Mildred's medical training in London could become a valuable supplement to their evangelism now. Their first two years together in the Huozhou station saw great efforts put into repair and construction projects, among which were buildings that could accommodate classrooms for girls and space for mission activities. With no doubt, the construction of new buildings laid the basis for the future expansion of the mission station.

Eva and Mildred shared a strong belief in the importance of providing education for Chinese girls and women. However, different from Eva and Mildred's emphasis, the CIM at that time emphasized preaching the Gospel as widely as possible, rather than educational work, and education was a controversial subject among the missionaries at

the time.[98] Some missionaries of the CIM saw education as "a diversion from the supreme call to evangelise."[99] Despite those different opinions, Mildred and Eva bowed to the needs of the Huozhou church and took on the responsibility for educational work in Huozhou.

There were many reasons for their belief in education. First, having benefited from the work of pioneer women missionaries, they found out that Chinese Christians were very active in evangelistic work. As Mildred recorded, "the work of evangelization was being carried on with tremendous aggressive force by the native Church."[100] Therefore, more means of evangelism needed to be devised. Secondly, they also realised that it was imperative to establish girls' schools because "unless they trained some Christian teachers, the education of the young would be in the hands of heathen."[101] The last reason was the urgent need of preparing some Chinese staff for the church. While as missionaries they realised the necessity of education, the urgent request of education for hundreds of girls in Christian homes strengthened their determination to restore institutions for girls.

Apart from these demands for the purpose of evangelism, Mildred and Eva had full confidence in Chinese women's abilities. They believed that young women of the Chinese Church were "earnest devoted servants of Jesus Christ, who, given the training and granted the blessing of God, could do a work which it would be impossible for the most earnest Westerner to accomplish."[102] Furthermore, as Linda Benson has discussed,

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[98] Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible: the China Inland Mission 1865-1965* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 87.
[99] Griffiths, "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 52.
[100] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 69.
[101] Ibid., 70.
[102] Ibid., 71.

the tragic stories of Chinese girls and women in their writings who had difficult lives and suffered from the patriarchy system also implied the Trio's conviction that "conversion to Christianity, combined with a good education, would help Chinese women to overcome some of the problems they faced."[103] Therefore, with their evangelistic enthusiasm, Mildred and Eva accepted the challenge as a need of the Chinese Church of Huozhou.

The first step was training teachers for the girls' school in Huozhou. When the Huozhou station was re-opened in 1902, Mildred Cable gathered some girls from Christian families for training, each of them having a personal experience of conversion with exceptional strength of character. Far from proficient at that time in the Chinese language, Mildred sat with these Christian girls around her and taught them the first elements of arithmetic and geography while inspiring them with a great enthusiasm for the work.[104] By 1907 the girls' school of Huozhou was referred to as "Miss Cable's school" by CIM publications. The school had a complete educational system for Christian girls. There were ten or twelve classes at various stages in the elementary and secondary schools. For children under the age required to enter the elementary school, there was a kindergarten room for their educational preparation. The enrolment of 1907 was "up to nearly seventy girls, twenty-three of whom professed Christianity."[105]

When Francesca joined Eva and Mildred's missionary work in Huozhou in 1909, the duties were divided among the three, with each woman developing her own sphere of expertise. Mildred continued to be in charge of the girls' school as administrator; Eva

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[103] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 42.
[104] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 107.
[105] Linda Benson, "A Gobi Mission: Alice Mildred Cable of the CIM," in *The Missionary Kaleidoscope*, ed. by Kathleen Lodwick, and W. K. Cheng (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2005), 132.

taught classes and took most responsibilities of visitation to neighbouring communities; Francesca helped Mildred's work in the school dispensary and taught classes in the upper girls' school too.[106] The division of duties helped to cover every aspect of evangelistic work in Huozhou and the operation of work was highly efficient. As time went by, the missionary work of Huozhou station was expanded to cover the girls' school, Normal Training College, the Women's School which bore the title "Bible School", the Compound Dispensary, and a women's opium refuge. Together the Trio brought mission work for women in Huozhou to an unprecedented level.

In order to meet the demand for qualified teachers for the rapidly growing school, a Normal Training College was set up as one department of the school. The requirements for entering this department were strict. Having a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures was the primary qualification for the candidates. Among these girls, only those who "by Christian character gave promise when trained of being missionaries to their own people" could be enrolled in teacher training.[107] As Normal students they studied outlines of the Old and New Testament and did some detailed work on selected Bible books. The elementary and secondary schools were the training ground for their practice in teaching during their last term at the Normal Training College. In addition to the teacher training they received in this college, Normal students were asked to take courses in First Aid, Home Nursing and Invalid Cookery. They also had training in the dispensary and aided with healing patients. Some Normal students were from far distant provinces and had been selected for the training so that they could be trained for teacher

[106] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 49.
[107] Ibid., 235.

positions in their own areas.[108] In the CIM Conference of 1922 at Shanghai, Mildred told her colleagues that "from Huozhou School, fifty teachers were in Mission schools and seventy in Government schools."[109]

At the same time, the institutions of Huozhou station became some of the widely popular schools in Shanxi with the coverage from kindergarten to Normal Training school and widespread source of students. The Girls' School had occupied four courts by then and the ages of the students ranged from five years old to young women of over twenty. The Normal Training College was one of its departments. All teachers on the staff were Christian and had been trained there. As for the administrative board, Mildred was Principal, assisted by Francesca, with Ling Ai, an outstanding Chinese teacher, as Vice-Principal.[110] The staff was increased by graduates qualifying from the Normal Training College.. Students in the school came from wide areas within and outside of Shanxi Province, which included from the border of Mongolia, Shaanxi, Henan, and Zhili Provinces, in addition to those from all other CIM Schools in central Shanxi. The education of the Girls' School covered a "standard Western education" course of study and the courses offered in Chinese schools. The students were required to master 500 new Chinese characters in each three-month term. By graduation, the student could "repeat by heart the greater part of the New Testament, Psalms, and the classical works of Confucius and Mencius."[111] Also, the classes taught Western science

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[108] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 118, 228.
[109] Platt, *Three Women*, 62.
[110] Ibid., 47.
[111] Cable, *The Fulfilment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 234-5.

courses which included "hands on learning as the students explored beehives, examined ant hills, and studied the lives and habits of birds."[112]

While the Girls' School provided opportunities for the education of Christian girls, the Women's Bible School, which was established in 1912, was for senior girls and married women. Eva was its Principal from 1912 to 1921. The School was developed from a course for married women added to the Girls' School and became an independent institution running in three-month terms. The Bible School began with literacy for women without education and allowed those with some education to learn more at the Girls' School during their stay at the Bible School.[113] As some women from the Bible School would go back into their villages as evangelists and leaders, as wives and mothers, it was hoped that "the Bible might become the 'foundation of a new social order' in China."[114] Consequently, under the guidance of its motto "woe is me if I preach not the Gospel,"[115] the Bible School became an evangelistic centre for women in Huozhou.

The Trio's evangelistic work in Huozhou would not be complete without mentioning the women's opium refuge and the Compound Dispensary. The refuge was set up under the name Mission House and was under the charge of a Chinese woman named "Mother Ma." Since medical work was always a helpful method of evangelization, a dispensary was established on the compound of the Girls' School.[116]

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[112] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 52.
[113] CIM Conference Report 1922, 71-2, cited by Griffiths in "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Misiion and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 53.
[114] Platt, *Three Women*, 45.
[115] Cable, *The Fulfilment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 158.
[116] Platt, *Three Women*, 46-7.

Mildred and Francesca's medical training in England proved to be extremely useful not only in the villages they visited but also at the dispensary.

The significant efforts the Trio put into the institutions of the Huozhou mission station did not indicate that they had neglected their most important responsibilities of evangelism. As a matter of fact, not only did they visit the neighbouring communities, they also devised many activities to bring Christian teaching to the people of Huozhou. For instance, the Trio planned a six-day "Mission to Women" in Huozhou and the opening of the new church in 1907 provided the occasion for it. In addition to several talks by visiting speaker Miss Gregg, the community also attended prayer and Bible study sessions. The Trio received 350 guests when the day came and these guests together with school girls, Bible School students and helpers provided a resident congregation of nearly 500. In addition to women guests, many men and children also came to attend sessions. It was recorded that the attendees came from not only from Huozhou but also from a wide area outside of Huozhou.[117] Also, the Trio added a special course at the girls' school for married Christian women from the villages around Huozhou. The course only lasted twenty to thirty days due to the consideration of farming time but it gave those women some knowledge of the Christian way of life. Thus, it is not hard to see that the Trio devoted great efforts to spreading Christianity among women in Huozhou and neighbouring areas.

However, the opening of schools for girls was obviously the most prominent contribution of the Trio's missionary work in Huozhou. Although like most mission schools the original purpose of establishing institutions for girls was to provide wives for Chinese Christians and to train Bible women and teachers for the evangelistic

[117] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 170-3.

work,[118] the schools offered an opportunity for education to hundreds of girls from Christian families, rather than any child who applied, in Huozhou and in widespread areas outside of the city. Although the teaching of these schools focused on religious studies, they also provided "standard Western education" courses and courses offered in Chinese schools as well. Besides, the schools of Huozhou station helped the pupils at all levels to learn about managing money and basic economics by giving each girl a "bank account" upon her arrival in the fall.[119] Undoubtedly, the comprehensive knowledge covered by these courses would widen students' horizons and open a larger arena for their future.

Therefore, we can see that the Trio's concern in their evangelistic work was not only to bring Christianity to women in Huozhou but to provide Chinese women with enough education for their future lives. The Chinese teachers in the schools were all female and all were graduates of the mission station itself. Some of them even occupied administrative positions. The best example for this is Miss Liang Ling Ai who served as Vice Principal first and later as headmistress of the girls' school.[120] Many young mission-trained women became evangelists of the station and their performance won the Trio's admiration, which was indicated in the words of a short pamphlet written by Mildred —"One of God's gifts to this station has been that of young women whose vocation is that of evangelists."[121] Additionally, the Normal Training College provided great numbers of qualified teachers for schools within Shanxi Province and across the country as well. In the CIM Conference at Shanghai in 1922, Mildred Cable revealed

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[118] Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity* 1860-1927, 16.
[119] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 53.
[120] Platt, *Three Women*, 47.
[121] Mildred Cable, *Sowing the Seed: Whose Life is in Itself* (London: n.p., no date), cited in ibid., 54.

that from Huozhou school fifty teachers were in Mission schools and seventy in Government schools.[122] Just as William James Platt appraises the Trio's evangelistic work in his writing about these three women, the Trio had "brought to Chinese women and girls, by word and deed, new life in Jesus Christ."[123]

While the Trio carried through the theme of the foreign missionary movement—"women's work for women"— outstandingly during their twenty-year evangelistic work in Huozhou mission station, they also proved their own prominent capabilities as overseas missionaries. Their performance in the work was best indicated by their achievements in the schools and itineration as well. It demonstrated their abilities in administration and evangelism. Meanwhile, the independence of the Trio in their evangelistic work in the Huozhou station was also quite impressive, which could be seen from their decision on the expansion of educational institutions in the Huozhou station in spite of the opposite opinions from other missionaries and, more obviously, from their abilities of raising funds for reconstruction and expansion of the mission station. With the self-funded policy of the CIM and its decision to accept no compensation for the loss of life or destruction of property during the Boxer Rising (unlike most mission organizations), [124] missionaries themselves took the responsibilities of ensuring the financing of their evangelistic work and their own lives as well. As for the Trio, although their wealthy family backgrounds ensured that they had a comfortable living and even provided the cost for reconstruction of the station initially, the expansion of the station needed far more funds than they could provide. Therefore, the Trio did their best to raise funds for the evangelistic work in Huozhou

[122] Platt, *Three Women*, 62.
[123] Ibid., 65.
[124] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 41.

station during their furloughs. It was recorded that when Mildred and Eva went back to England in 1908, Mildred raised 260 pounds 4 shillings by visiting Westminster Chapel and addressing the congregation on several occasions.[125] While the Trio were at the station, they never stopped communicating with supporters at home and collecting funds too. With great cooperation among the three women and perfect combination of their talents, the Trio displayed their competence in handling a traditionally male-dominated profession.

The Images of Chinese Women in the Trio's Writing

The Trio's evangelistic work in the Huozhou mission station would not have been so remarkable had they not received consistent support and help from the Chinese women of Huozhou city. In the Trio's writings on their evangelism in Huozhou they indicated their perspectives on images of Chinese women. As discussed in chapter one, the Trio's assumptions about Chinese women before their evangelism in China had been inevitably influenced by the popular ideology of Oriental women in Britain at that time. The opportunity of preaching the Gospel in China for decades provided the Trio a chance to know Chinese women by their own experiences. After twenty years of working with Chinese female staff and preaching the Gospel among Chinese women, the Trio had discovered many other characteristics of Chinese women that were not familiar to the West at that time, such as independence, ambition, determination, and intelligence. The Trio revealed their admiration of those women in their writings.

[125] "Report", Westminster Record, August 1909, letter from Mildred Cable, indicating the specific sum, cited in ibid., 47.

When it came to the contribution of Chinese women to evangelism of Huozhou, Mrs. Xi was the one taken as the role model for Chinese Christian women in Huozhou. When Pastor Xi began to preach the Gospel in Huozhou, Mrs. Xi gave her full support to him and became one of the first women who converted to Christianity in the district. The most significant contribution of Mrs. Xi to Pastor Xi's evangelism was to contribute all her jewellery to the funds for the establishment of the opium refuge in Huozhou.[126] In addition, Mrs. Xi consistently devoted herself to assisting Pastor Xi's evangelistic work. It was recorded that when Mrs. Xi offered to look after two women from Taiyuan in 1886 her work was so impressive that Hudson Taylor instituted districts of "women's stations," in locations with no foreign male missionaries and where the women worked under the supervision of Chinese pastors.[127] Mildred contributed two full chapters of her book—*The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*— to Mrs. Xi and believed that "this community life for so large a number was only made possible by Mrs. Xi's enthusiastic devotion."[128]

Another outstanding example was Mrs. Liang, who was described by Mildred as "strong, true, a woman of no ordinary ability, little escaped her penetrating glance."[129] After she was baptized by the first foreign woman missionary, Miss Anna Jacobsen, in Huozhou, the first thing Mrs. Liang did was to unbind her own feet and her daughter Ling Ai's feet as well. Soon, she sent Ling Ai to the girls' school. When the Trio came to Huozhou, Mrs. Liang was one of the first to assist and quickly endeared herself to the Trio by her thoughtful, kind, and practical ways. She gave the preaching work her

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[126] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 7.
[127] Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 240.
[128] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 6.
[129] Ibid., 160.

unusual energy and devotion. Mildred recorded that "to-day there are few women in Hwochow who do not know her, and scarcely a courtyard that has not been visited by her."[130]

While the above two women were good examples of married Chinese women devoting themselves to evangelism, Ling Ai was the best representative of young women who benefited from the Trio's educational efforts and obtained great achievements in the fulfillment of Chinese women's capabilities. After her graduation from the schools of Huozhou station, Ling Ai, as did many other graduates, stayed and became a teacher. With prominent administrative abilities, Ling Ai first was Mildred's assistant, then became Vice Principal of the girls' school, and later she served as its headmistress. Her achievements best indicated the Trio's educational aims for Chinese women that not only brought Christianity to them but, more importantly, gave them the necessary knowledge, training and skills for their future. Mildred regarded Ling Ai as her "faithful and beloved fellow-missionary" in the Huozhou station and believed that apart from Ling Ai's comradeship the establishment of a large school and training college would have been impossible.[131]

The three Chinese women listed here were just a few women among many others, whom the Trio discussed in their writings about the contributions of Chinese women to the missionary work. These Chinese women were working together for girls and women of their country. They were independent new women with a career they devoted themselves to. Besides, Mildred also took care to include some positive comments about familial concern for children, particularly concern of fathers who made

[130] Ibid., 162.
[131] Ibid., 106.

sacrifices for their daughters and who were determined to see their girls educated.[132] This concern of fathers for girls' education clearly indicated some new changes of Chinese traditions—girls were allowed to accept good education and fathers hoped the good education of their daughters could bring a better life for their girls. Undoubtedly, the changes were influenced by the social changes in the entire country at the time. However, it was quite possible that the images of the Trio and Chinese women staff in schools as independent and professional women set up successful examples for Chinese girls in the communities of Huozhou.

On the other hand, the personal encounters with Chinese women drew the Trio close to many Chinese girls and women who faced problems resulting from the Chinese patriarchy at the time. Mildred used an entire chapter of her book, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, to tell the tragic story of Fan Ai Do. Ai Do was a graduate of the girls' school at its pioneering time and was invited to teach when the Huozhou girls' school was reopened by the Trio. Mildred described her as someone who "had all the characteristics of a natural leader; and she easily controlled the girls and was much beloved by them."[133] Under the domineering will of her mother, Ai Do was married to a wild and dissolute man who was also an opium addict. The sorrows and sufferings brought her life to an end shortly after giving birth to her son. At the end of the chapter, while expressing her sadness for losing such a good teacher and assistant, Mildred demonstrated her optimism and confidence in Chinese young women—" the 'trees of the Lord are full of sap,' and if a leaf has fallen there is always a fresh one developing

[132] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 54.
[133] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 102.

to replace it."[134] From Ling Ai and other Chinese young women who were in the happy fellowship of the schools Mildred saw the hope of Chinese women.

The Trio's Efforts for Equality in Mission Work

While the Trio devoted themselves to evangelistic work among Chinese women, they made efforts to increase the role of Western women and Chinese women in the CIM as well. As I have discussed in chapter one, although the feminist movement had obtained some rights for women by the beginning of the twentieth century, inequality still existed, in society and in the mission societies. Despite the fact that the majority of mission workers of the CIM were women, they were never granted admission to the administration. However, there had been some voices for acknowledging women's contribution to the mission since the beginning of the twentieth century. Among them was the Trio's call for improvement of women's status in the CIM.

The Trio's public advocacy of female equality in mission work was influenced by the great achievements of the Suffrage Movement after the First World War. The Trio went back to England for furlough in 1918, the year that women over thirty years old were given the right to vote in Britain, and to be parliamentary candidates.[135] The success indisputably had an impact on the Trio as well as other women members of mission societies and encouraged them to fight for increasing women's status in the mission organizations.

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[134] Ibid., 106.

[135] Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movement in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 240.

The Trio were actively involved in the discussion of the new changes in women's legal rights and social status. All three of them spoke their thoughts on the issues at conferences both in Europe and in China. Among the three, Mildred was the most public voice on such issues and "her name would soon appear in print beside those of some of the most outspoken Western women advocates for female equality in mission work."[136]

When the Trio returned to China in 1921, they found out there were strong voices of women missionaries for the full emancipation of Chinese women and a greater role for females in mission work. The conference on "women's work" held in Shanghai in 1920 indicated the strong request of women members of mission organizations for equality. The conference passed a significant resolution: "That the China for Christ Movement take a definite stand and actively educate public opinion against polygamy, forced marriages, and slavery and that it work for the establishment of an equal moral standard for men and women."[137] Clearly, women missionaries' request focused more on the status of Chinese women.

Mildred called for the improvement of women's place in the Church in an article published in *The Chinese Recorder* in its February issue of 1922. In the article, she stated the importance of the ministry of women and insisted that women's work should receive the recognition and moral support of the Church. She argued that the various abilities bestowed on men, including "the gift of philosophic reason, the gift of comprehension of thought, the gift of healing, and the gift of eloquence,"[138] among

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[136] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 67.
[137] "Conference on Women's Work: a New Era for Women's Work," *The Chinese Recorder* (February 1920): 118-23.
[138] Mildred Cable, "The Ministry of Women in the Chinese Church," *The Chinese Recorder* (February

many others, were not denied to women. She believed that the evangelization of China must be through the efforts of her own people and the recognition of women's work in the mission field would "open up an avenue of service which, wisely handled, might lead to great things."[139] In the article, due to her belief that "Chinese women as deaconesses have been an unqualified success," she strongly emphasized "the value of the public recognition of the pastoral gifts by the ordination of such women to the diaconate."[140] She ended the article with a plea to the leaders of the Church "to see, recognize and use the spiritual endowments of all its members."[141]

The Trio's call for recognition of women missionaries' contribution as well as other such voices in the CIM helped to impel some leaders of the mission to bring the topic on the improvement of women missionaries' status to the agendas of CIM conferences. However, as discussed in chapter one, although it was discussed in many sessions of the CIM conferences from 1922 Shanghai conference on, there was no sign of progress in giving women members equal rights to men. The fact that many women members of the CIM turned down the suggestion of women's representation on the China Council in 1927 indicated that many of the women workers of the CIM had different views on their own status and that of Chinese women when it came to gender equality. For most of the women missionaries working in China, it was only Chinese women who needed to fight for equality.

For the Trio, the goal of improving women's role in mission work was not just for Chinese women workers. In Mildred's article, she clearly argued that the Church

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1922): 118-20.
[139] Ibid., 119.
[140] Ibid., 120.
[141] Inid., 120.

should value all of its member's contributions and all women's place in the Church should be considered. Therefore, their advocacy of equality was for all women members of the Church: the western women and the Chinese women. Their public support of a stronger position for women in the CIM leadership ranks indicated that they realised the inequality in the mission administration. The maturity of the Trio's view on women's role in mission work brought new perceptions to their achievements in the evangelism in the Huozhou station and the "nativization" of the Chinese Christian church, which, in turn, helped the Trio to make a decision on the direction of their next stage.

Call from the Northwest

The Trio were the third generation of women missionaries from the CIM in Huozhou city. After more than twenty years' hard work, the Trio had established a complete system covering educational, medical and charitable institutions for evangelistic work and helped to develop the Chinese Church there. Seeing the rapidly increasing number of Chinese Christians and the promising development of Chinese Church in the Huozhou, the Trio felt that "evangelisation and elementary teaching require no further foreign help now"[142] and they also thought about the freedom and responsibility of the Chinese Church for its own affairs. Thus, having devoted themselves to preaching the Gospel among Chinese girls and women of Huozhou for more than twenty years, the Trio began to think seriously about their places in Huozhou evangelistic work and considered the next phase of their mission.

[142] Ibid., 63.

Northwest China was the area covering Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang and part of Mongolia. As an area religiously dominated by Islam, the northwest was a place entirely barren of Christianity. Although it was thought that "Islam was the impossible-possible problem"[143] when Christian missionaries faced it, the call of the "great north-west" had been strong since the first CIM missionary, Dr. Cameron, encountered Muslims there. The CIM itself was deeply concerned with working further beyond Gansu province; it was a vast territory still waiting for the Gospel. In pursuit of this call, many passionate missionaries had gone to the northwest and devoted their lives to evangelization there, including George Hunter with Percy Mather joining him later in Xinjiang and George Harris in Xining.[144] However, with people scattered widely and various minorities residing there, evangelism efforts needed more missionaries.

Therefore, when the Trio were considering their next place of evangelism, the call of the northwest attracted their eyes to Central Asia. Meanwhile, they had also met some Gansu missionaries in past years and the needs of missionaries in the northwest had left a deep impression on their minds.[145] On many different occasions, Mildred mentioned their aspiration to itinerate there. In the Conference of the CIM at Shanghai in 1922, Mildred said "in principle we, as a Mission, purpose moving from our settled stations to unevangelized regions, but in practice, the time never seems to come. A missionary does not enter a district to settle permanently."[146] During their more than two decades in Huozhou, the Trio spent more time in the institutions than preaching the Gospel. As the Trio explained later, "the duties associated with the school absorbed so

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[143] Lyall. *A Passion for the Impossible*, 155.
[144] Ibid., 156.
[145] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 126-9.
[146] Platt, *Three Women*, 64.

much time and effort that they had become administrators rather than missionaries."[147] Now since the evangelistic work in Huozhou had developed well and the Chinese Church there had been established under the oversight of Chinese Christians, the time for the Trio to move forward had arrived.

Additionally, new reforms of Shanxi by Governor Yan Xishan had a great impact on the mission's educational work. By 1921, Yan had established over seventy government-sponsored schools for both boys and girls. These schools followed a curriculum set by the national government and did not include religious education. The authorities staffed these new schools with missionary-educated girls and young women. Seventy girls of Huozhou mission schools took positions in them.[148] As the Trio mentioned in their writing, even with a modest education, girls "can obtain a lucrative post in a government school before completion of even a higher primary course."[149] With so many students lost, the mission's Normal Training College and the higher grade school had to be closed. As for the Primary school, the Chinese staff took charge of it very well.[150] Thus, the educational work of Huozhou mission station could be left to the Chinese staff's hands with no worry.

Another important reason for the Trio's leaving for the northwest was the dramatic social changes of 1920s China and their impact on mission activity. The 1920s was a decade when significant changes happened in the missionary societies of China as Chinese nationalism rose. "Anti-Imperialism" and the "Anti-Christian movement" were two versions of this nationalism. In 1922, the Anti-Christian Movement broke out and

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[147] Benson, "A Gobi Mission," in *The Missionary Kaleidoscope,* ed. Lodwick and Cheng, 134.
[148] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 75.
[149] Mildred Cable, Eva French and Francesca French, " 'Twenty-one years' work in Hwochow: A New Venture," *China's Millions* (September 1923), 136.
[150] Ibid., 137.

was fiercer than before.[151] Christian missions were inevitably affected by this widespread tide. Being an active part of Christian missions, mission schools were primarily attacked. By the summer of 1927 "a large proportion of missionaries, especially the Protestants, had withdrawn from the interior, even from sections not yet occupied by the Nationalist forces," and schools and hospitals were closed or were left to their Chinese employees.[152] The CIM took this change in China as a chance to reappraise its evangelistic work and carry out a policy that its missionaries hand over as much as possible to Chinese Christians.[153] The institutional work was just a part of evangelistic work for the CIM. As missionaries, their most important responsibility was to preach the Gospel. Comparatively, the movements against Christianity and Imperialism were more popular in south and north China.[154] It thus left the northwest and other isolated areas less touched. As a result, now there was the possibility of relocating missionaries to those neglected regions. Therefore, this change provided an opportunity for the Trio to fulfill their dreams of preaching the Gospel as widely as possible.

Thus, the combination of the social changes' impact on missionary work and their own aspirations took the Trio to a new path of evangelism—pioneering itinerant missionaries. The fact that Eva and Francesca were in their fifties and Mildred was in her forties did not become a barrier to their decision of preaching in north-western China but provided them with sufficient experience both in life and in their evangelistic

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[151] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967. First published in 1929), 694.
[152] Ibid., 699.
[153] Griffiths, "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 97.
[154] Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, 699.

work, which was thought to be more valuable than youth.[155] With great enthusiasm for evangelism, sturdy faith in Christianity and surpassing courage, these three middle-aged missionaries were determined to write a splendid chapter of their lives in the frontier of China.

Conclusion

To sum up, with no doubt the Trio's evangelistic work was prominent, influential and successful in the Huozhou mission station. The fact that many Chinese girls and women had fulfilled their lives in quite different ways from their older generations due to the Trio's work for women, especially educational work, demonstrated that the Trio did bring Chinese girls and women new insight into their lives and consciousness of their own value and rights. Meanwhile, working among Chinese girls and women helped the Trio to have a better understanding of them. Although it might not be possible for them to thoroughly give up their original assumptions about China and Chinese, the Trio's knowledge of Chinese women was different from that of most of their contemporaries after twenty years of evangelism among Chinese women. The Trio's writings on their evangelistic work in Huozhou clearly described the images of hardworking, dedicated and intelligent Chinese women to their readers. Furthermore, the Trio's devotion to the education of Chinese girls and women and their exploration of Chinese women's demands indicated that their work for Chinese girls and women also triggered process of reflection for the Trio about their own female identity and status in society. Due to this consciousness, they could quickly

[155] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, p. 123.

respond to the success of the Suffrage movement in Britain and call actively for equality in the CIM. Therefore, at this stage, the Trio showed the characteristics of feminists.

On the other hand, we should not ignore the influence of historical changes in Chinese society on the Trio's educational work at the time. Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, there had been a series of reformations and movements for modernization in China, such as the 1898 reform movement by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, the abolishment of the Civil Service Examination in 1905, the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, and the 1919 May Fourth Movement. Education was taken as one of the tools for a Chinese renaissance. Under the great impact of such significant social changes, the Chinese were eager for the opportunity for education, especially western education. Due to a lack of institutions at the time and the good reputation of mission schools, Chinese parents chose to send their children to mission schools. However, under the influence of the Anti-Christian Movement in 1920s and with more choices of being educated in government schools, a great number of students left mission schools for secular education. The Trio indicated that a large number of students in their schools left for "lucrative posts" in government schools when the Shanxi governor Yan Xishan inaugurated new forms in 1921 and set up many government schools. Whether the students left for lucrative teaching positions or for education without Christianity involved demonstrates that due to the impact of social changes in China it would be hard for the Trio to make more achievements in evangelism at Huozhou mission station.

Although the Trio did not talk much about the social impact on their work, they had a quite objective attitude toward their evangelistic work in Huozhou. It was

indicated in their writings, especially the one about evangelism in Huozhou—*The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's: The Story of the Work in Hwochow.* While giving a detailed account of evangelical work in Huozhou from Pastor Xi's time to the Trio's, Mildred recorded some failed cases of their evangelical work under a chapter named "Another Portrait Gallery."[156] In the chapter, Mildred described the vulnerability of "greatest change":

> The emergence from heathendom is a difficult process, during which time habits, vices, and superstitions cling to a man's soul with a tenacity that would cause us to abandon all hope, were it not that monuments of grace abound to prove that the power and dominion of sin has been shattered.[157]

By analyzing the failed cases, Mildred pointed out the tough task missionaries faced and suggested that "The missionary's best way to help the young believer is by emphasising the big claim that Christ makes on a man. That claim once apprehended will create in man's heart an everlasting dissatisfaction with anything lower."[158] Obviously, the Trio made use of failed cases to sum up helpful experience for those following missionaries.

When the Trio decided to leave the successful work they had built up in Huozhou to be pioneering itinerant missionaries in northwestern China, they made a choice that many women missionaries would not choose. According to Alvyn Austin, compared with some "intrepid lady explorers" of the CIM, "Most women were more timid. They 'lived around' for the first two years until they married and moved to their husbands' stations, or remained single and settled at permanent stations."[159] However,

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[156] Cable, *The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor Hsi's*, 211-20.
[157] Ibid., 212.
[158] Ibid., 214.
[159] Austin, *China's Millions*, 238.

the CIM demanded that the women, like the men, be full missionaries. The Trio responded not only by "go[ing] out unmarried and pass[ing] the probation and language exams,"[160] but also by deciding to be the "intrepid lady explorers" of northwestern China. It was this intrepid exploration that won their renowned names and laid the foundation for their future successes in many fields.

[160] Ibid.

Chapter Three

"Spread the Seed": the Trio's Itineration among Muslim Women in Northwestern China

What the Trio had achieved in their twenty years of evangelism in Huozhou mission station was not too much different from that of some other women missionaries in the CIM. However, it was a phase that the Trio grew to be competent overseas missionaries and accumulated experiences both in evangelism and in lives among Chinese. In the meantime, it was a time that the Trio's views on women's status came to take form. The Trio's consciousness of gender equality indicated their feminist ideologies and their call for improvement of women's status in the CIM publicly announced their demands for women's rights. If we consider this phase as a time that the Trio's feminist identities began to emerge, their twelve years of itineration in northwestern China can be taken as a stage of the establishment of their feminist identities. It was in the far northwest of China that the Trio put into practice their ideologies on women missionaries' equal rights in mission service and fulfilled their lives at a level that few contemporaries could reach.

When the Trio chose to be itinerant missionaries in northwestern China, they were determined to face not only the severe environment but a tough challenge: evangelism among Muslims. For quite a long time in the missionary world the evangelization of Muslims was taken as a big challenge to the faith, with many difficulties. It was thought that the Muslims' ancient stronghold was "impenetrable as walls of brass"[161] and "the missions to the Muslims were fruitless, if not hopeless."[162]

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[161] Lyall. *A Passion for the Impossible*, 155.

Christianity and Islam had been at each other's throats for centuries,[163] but missionaries still put great efforts towards the evangelism of Muslims in most Islamic lands, in spite of the hostility of the Muslim world.

Aside from the hostile attitudes of Muslims toward missionaries, mastering the languages spoken by local Muslims was also another big challenge for preaching among them. As for the Trio, they not only needed to learn Arabic but also, more importantly, the particular language that was used by most Muslims they would meet in northwestern China, which was Turkic, spoken by most Muslims there. The language study began after the Trio started their work in northwestern China. According to the Trio's books, their language study first began at the London School of Oriental Language under Sir Denison Ross during their 1927-1928 furlough.[164] From that time on, they kept up intense study. Their books indicated they had several native tutors. A woman from Khotan (now Hetian, in southern Xinjiang) whom they called "Lady Tobak" taught them in Suzhou (Gansu) during the winter months of 1928-1929.[165] When the Trio stayed in Urumqi in the winter months of 1929-1930, a Mullah called Hassan Ahung from Turfan taught them each morning.[166] Then, a young man named Qurban taught the Trio in the summer of 1931 despite the opposition of the local Muslim clergy at Suzhou. By February of 1930, the Trio had mastered the language well enough to preach in Turkic when they stopped at Turfan, an oasis with few residents speaking Chinese. Like other new learners of a language, the Trio's mistakes

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[162] Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement For Foreign Missions, 1907), 209.
[163] Raphael Israeli, *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation* (London: Curzon Press and Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1980), 3.
[164] Evageline French, Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *A Desert Journal: Letters From Central Asia* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1934), 44.
[165] Ibid.
[166] French, Cable and French, *A Desert Journal,* 93.

were inevitable, but bystanders helped to set them right. Therefore, considering their continuous interaction with Turkic-speaking Muslims in the following years, it was quite possible for them to master the language well enough for fluent communication. Their writings also indicated they had no problems in talking with Turkic-speaking Muslims. Therefore, the Trio could bring words of the Gospel to most of the people they met during their itineration in northwestern China.

Due to the widely scattered population and high percentage of Muslims, the Trio's evangelism had quite different characteristics in the northwest from that of Huozhou. Spreading Christianity as widely as possible was more emphasized than the number of converts, and medical work played a vital role in accessing Muslims. Also, due to the particular circumstances of Muslim women, the Trio used a different approach while preaching among Muslim women. As women that enjoyed independence, freedom, celibacy and the profession of missionary, the Trio's lives contrasted with the lives of Muslim women remarkably and this information was spread wherever they itinerated and among whomever they met. Therefore, with no need of calling for improvement of Muslim women's status in northwestern China publicly, the Trio's lives themselves best illustrated feminist ideologies for Muslim women. In this chapter, I will discuss the strategy of the Trio's evangelism in northwestern China to evaluate their impact on Muslim women and explore how the Trio's feminist ideologies exerted influence on Muslim women they met in their itineration.

The Interest in the Evangelism of Chinese Muslims

Compared to evangelism among Han Chinese, Chinese Muslims had been neglected in most parts of China since the eighth century. The number of Chinese Muslims was only a small part of China's total population, not more than two and one half per cent,[167] and they were scattered widely throughout the entire country. In a survey made in 1922 by the China Continuation Committee, the maximum figure of Muslims was given as 8,336,000.[168] Most of them were concentrated in the far southwest and northwest provinces. With the growth of mission societies in China, interest in the problem of evangelism among Chinese Muslims came to the surface and obtained attention from the missions. Articles written by missionaries working in various parts of the country about Muslim doctrines and customs appeared in periodicals such as the *Chinese Recorder* and *The Muslim World*, and papers on the same subjects were read at various conferences.

Meanwhile, two important events stimulated further interest and the movement of missionaries in evangelism among Chinese Muslims. One was the Cairo Conference of 1906, which aroused the Christian world to a larger interest in the world of Islam. In the same year a series of booklets was launched in China entitled *Testimony of First Converts,* and was published until 1910 by the Christian Literature Society in Shanghai.[169] The Cairo Conference marked a great step in advancing the evangelization of the Islamic world because the conference's published reports were the first full information about the actual state of Islamic lands early in the twentieth century. It

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[167] Mark E. Botham, "Methods of Evangelism among Chinese Muslims," The *Muslim World,* Vol. 11, (January 1921), 169.
[168] Samuel. M. Zwemer, "The Fourth Religion of China," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 24, (January 1934), 5.
[169] George K. Harris, "Literature for Chinese Muslims," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 16, (July 1926), 190.

inaugurated more accurate observations and careful reports from missionaries in Islamic lands.[170]

The other event was Dr. Samuel Zwemer's visit to China in 1917, which was taken as "of the utmost value in bringing interest to a head."[171] It gave another great stimulus to those interested in the work of Chinese Muslims and marked the beginning of a new movement to provide suitable literature for this class of the population. A special committee that acted in conjunction with the China Continuation Committee was formed to organize work for Muslims. Several experts began translating books that were suitable for Muslims into Chinese.[172] The committee did invaluable work in the production of special literature.

Interest in the problem of the evangelization of Chinese Muslims thus developed into a call for preaching among Chinese Muslims, especially those in northwestern China where local Muslims had been overlooked for a long time and many areas were still barren lands for Christianity. Therefore, under this call of the great northwest many missionaries went there and devoted many years, even their entire lives, to evangelism in the isolated parts of China. It was under this influence that the Trio left their twenty-year successful work in Huozhou of Shanxi Province and became itinerant missionaries in northwestern China for the next twelve years.

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[170] E. M. Wherry, Samuel Marinus Zwemer and C. G. Mylrea, ed., *Islam and Mission*. (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), 10.
[171] Issac Mason, "Christian Work Among Chinese Muslims," *China Mission Year Book* (1924), 170.
[172] George. W. Hunter, "The Chinese Muslims of Turkestan," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 10, (January 1920), 171.

Muslim Women's Condition in China

As during their evangelistic work in Huozhou, the Trio's evangelistic objective was still women in northwestern China, particularly Muslim women, although they would preach to mixed congregations as well. Although the Trio already had twenty years of experience in the evangelization of Chinese women, Muslim women in northwestern China were a totally new group for them. With a different language, a different culture, and more importantly, an already existing strong religious belief, Muslim women turned out to be a tough objective for the Trio's evangelism.

As far as the Muslim women of China were concerned, in many westerners' eyes the condition of women in the northwest was more like that of their religious sisters in the Middle East while those in the other parts of China had more in common with their ordinary Han Chinese neighbours. Compared to non-Muslim Chinese women, Muslim women in China occupied a doubly subordinate status. Not only were they subordinate to men, as their heathen sisters were, but they also had a subordinate status in relation to the Han Chinese majority.[173] Being Muslim women, they had long been outside the Chinese cultural and educational mainstream. Their social circles were much more limited than those of Muslim men and non-Muslim women. Muslim women were confined to their homes due to some ritual separation of gender, and secluded from non-Muslim women because of avoidance of pork. Their duty was to maintain a "good Muslim household."[174] For Muslim women of northwestern China, like those of the Middle East, the wealthier Muslim men always had several wives. And the wives could

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[173] Barbara L. K. Pillsbury, "Being Female in a Muslim Minority in China," in *Women in the Muslim World,* edited by Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978), 651-73.

[174] Ibid., 657.

be divorced by a simple repudiation from their husbands.[175] Therefore, these assumptions put Muslim women in northwestern China into an image of sufferers from strict seclusion, patriarchy and Islamic domination. At the same time, it also indicated that the seclusion of Muslim women gave no possibility for male missionaries' evangelism.

As for the religious education of Muslim women, although they received less intensive instruction and did not continue their studies as many years as Muslim men, the religious instruction they received still included the fundamentals of Islam and "the Muslim language," Arabic as well.[176] Therefore, "in the case of women, whether living in seclusion or not, less learning will be required than for men, but it would be a great mistake to suppose that an intimate acquaintance with all matters Mohammedan is not advisable. Even with ignorant women the more the worker knows about Mohammedanism and the Quran and Arabic the better."[177] Therefore, mastering Turkic and Arabic undoubtedly opened the door to Muslim women for the Trio's evangelism.

Thus, as the first women itinerant missionaries in northwestern China, the Trio took the responsibility for bringing Christianity to Muslim women there. Meanwhile, itineration among Muslim women also provided an opportunity for the Trio to learn more about the lives of Muslim women in northwestern China. In this way, the Trio not only had roles as evangelists to spread Christianity, but also played roles as messengers to tell westerners about the real lives of Muslim women in northwestern China.

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[175] Ibid., 661.
[176] Ibid., 656.
[177] Rev. T. Grahame Bailey, "Work among Illiterate Muslims," in *Methods of Mission Work Among Muslims*, papers read at the First Missionary Conference on behalf of the Mohammedan World at Cairo in 1906, 54.

Therefore, the interaction of two cultures determined that it would have an impact on both Muslim women and the Trio themselves.

The Attitude of Chinese Muslims to Evangelism

Before the Trio began the evangelization of Muslims, they had little idea about the response of Muslims to their preaching. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, evangelism among Muslims was extremely hard with many barriers. Among all the difficulties, the toughest one was the attitude of Muslims to evangelism. It determined the effect of all methods missionaries used among Muslims. As for Chinese Muslims, their attitudes to evangelism were affected by many factors.

The attitude of Chinese Muslims towards Christianity was not unanimous as far as the entire country was concerned. There had been much friendliness shown in various parts but there had also been considerable opposition at the same time in other parts of the country. The varying responses to missionaries in different locations mostly depended on the size and viability of each given community.[178] Also, the political fortunes of Islam domestically and internationally and the degree to which local Muslims were acculturated into their Chinese environment influenced the responses.[179] Usually, small congregations of marginal Muslims seemed to be more receptive, and also, those living in Han-dominated areas that had been sinicized were more approachable. It had been stated in missionary writings that in some places Muslims seemed to have received the missionaries with courteous curiosity and showed interest in the Bible written in Arabic, which missionaries brought to them. A considerable

[178] Israeli, *Muslims in China*, 102.
[179] Raphael Israeli, "The Cross Battles the Crescent: One Century of Missionary Work Among Chinese Muslims 1850-1950," *Modern Asian Studie*, Vol. 29, I, (1995), 209.

number of Arabic Scriptures had been sold or given away in the Islamic districts. And the missionaries' experience in many mosques in China had been "of general friendliness, sometimes of generous welcome and readiness."[180] Some Muslims were extraordinarily open to discussing spiritual matters with missionaries in the mosques. Also, the missionaries were invited to Muslims' homes and built up friendships with them. In some places, Ahungs (Imams) were particularly friendly and even attended Sunday services led by the missionaries.[181] The most important thing of all was that some Muslims were converted. There was no doubt that these positive responses from Muslims were an encouragement to the evangelization of Muslims in China.

On the other hand, many missionaries indicated in their writings that the prevailing attitude of Muslims to evangelism was negative and mostly there was a rejection of the Gospel. In some cases, the presence of missionaries among Chinese Muslims was "objectionable" in spite of the Muslims' interest in discussing theology in general. And usually during the debate Muslims were always trying to argue that the Koran was the only one that held the truth.[182] In one instance, a missionary was hustled from a mosque.[183] Some Muslims bought Christian literature from the missionaries and burnt it in front of missionaries and their gathered audience. Many missionaries encountered such opposition during their evangelism among Muslims. The opposition was sometimes more intense in concentrated areas of Muslims, especially in the districts where the Ahung was earnest and the community was strongly united. There were several reports from missionaries about the persecution of those converted. George

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[180] Isaac Mason, "The Future of Islam in China," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 30, (January 1940), 79.
[181] Israeli.,"The Cross Battles the Crescent," 209.
[182] Ibid., 213.
[183] Major C. Braithwaite, "Methods of Evangelism Among Chinese Muslims," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 11, (January 1921), 171.

Harris of the CIM in Qinghai Province recorded in his article published in 1935 that a young Muslim in "Eastern Turkestan" died for his Christian faith, and one Muslim of Gansu Province suffered unusual kinds of persecution after he converted to Christianity.[184] In addition to this hostility from the local Muslim community, the manner in which the Muslims throughout the country united to prevent secession to Christianity was also remarkable. A Muslim General Advance Movement was set up in Beijing in 1911 and it had nearly two or three thousand branches all over the country within a few years.[185] To some extent, this movement instigated Muslims' antagonism towards evangelism. Thus, with no doubt, to preach among Muslims and deal with the hostility became the biggest challenge for missionaries.

However, it turned out that as three single women in middle age, the Trio had some advantages during their itineration among Muslims over their male colleagues. First, to most Muslims as well as other people in the northwest, the Trio were regarded as religious pilgrims like those Muslim and Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims.[186] Their long-distance treks only won admiration from most Central Asians. Secondly, they were three unarmed celibate women in middle age whose purpose was preaching. People did not take them as a threat. Also, their adopted daughter Topsy[187] (see discussion below),

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[184] George K. Harris, "The Muslims of China Today," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 25, (January 1935), 402.
[185] Mark E. Botham, "Chinese Islam as an Organism," *China Mission Year Book,* (1924), 80.
[186] Cable and French, *Something Happened,* 181.
[187] Topsy was a deaf and mute orphan and adopted officially by Mildred Cable on Christmas Eve, 1928. She was given the Chinese surname of Gai, which was the name Mildred Cable used, and the first name of Ailian. The Trio used the name of Topsy instead since it was difficult for the deaf and mute child to lip-read her Chinese first name. It indicated in the Trio's writings that Topsy accompanied them on most of their travels beginning in 1929 and was with them in England during their 1932-33 home leave. When the Trio left China in 1936, they brought Topsy with them. The Trio hired a tutor who was a specialist trained to teach deaf and mute children to help Topsy to speak and write in English. Itindicated in The Trio's writing that Topsy could write letters to friends and read replies without assistance. After the death of the Trio, Topsy was under the care of the Trio's friend, Edith Wheeler, and the supervision of the Salvation Army. She died on February 5, 1998. See Benson's account, *Across*

who was a deaf-and-dumb Chinese girl, was always with them during their itineration. Unintentionally, they showed their benevolence and kindness to people they met. Therefore, although the Trio itinerated among Muslims, they encountered more amity than hostility.

Preaching in "the City of Prodigals"

When the Trio left Huozhou for China's far northwest[188] on June 11, 1923, they had not been appointed to any specific place yet, but knew perfectly well "in their consciousness that they must courageously move forward until they reached the place of God's appointment."[189] At that time, between Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province and the border of Xinjiang Province there were only two mission stations of the CIM, and the last CIM station in Gansu Province was Ganzhou, which was seven days' journey west of Lanzhou. To reach the next mission station, in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Province, two months' journey from there was needed. Between them was the Gobi Desert. In such an area the Trio believed "there [was] surely scope for pioneer work."[190]

From 1923 to 1936, the Trio's twelve-year evangelism in northwestern China could be mainly divided into three parts: evangelism in Suzhou, 1924-1926; home leave, 1926-1928 and 1932-1934; itineration across the Gobi, 1929-1932 and 1934-1936. In

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China's Gobi, 143-6, 193-4, 216-39. Her story was also accounted in Mildred Cable and Francesca French's *The Story of Topsy: Little Lonely of Central Asia*.

[188] Northwestern China refers to the wide area covering today's Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang and part of Inner Mongolia. The Trio's itineration mainly covered northern Xinjiang, western Gansu, some parts of Qinghai and Inner Mongolia.

[189] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 130.

[190] Ibid., 130.

this chapter, I will focus on the first and the third parts to discuss the Trio's evangelistic work.

Although the Trio had set their eyes on the Gobi Desert, their evangelistic work began at the last station of the CIM in Gansu Province—Ganzhou. When the Trio arrived at Ganzhou in March 1924, they were quite impressed by the evangelistic work done by a Chinese missionary, Dr. Gao. At the request of Dr. Gao and forty church members, the Trio agreed to spend the summer instructing a class of Christian men and women.[191] A Short-Term Bible School was set up for twenty-five men and women, which gave six hours of instruction daily for a month. The school kept on expanding. By the end of the summer ninety more people registered for the class. Before the Trio left in the autumn of 1924, fifty men and women had been baptised, which was a distinct increase for the church.[192]

When the Trio travelled on to the next city, Suzhou—"the City of Prodigals" — they found their ideal place for beginning their evangelism.[193] Located on the old Silk Road, the city was known as "the last town in China" before the Gobi Desert and the frontier. Therefore, it was a stop for all parties travelling the desert trade routes to collect supplies. The trade route stretched northwest through Urumqi to Russia and Siberia, northeast across Outer Mongolia, and westwards to Kashgar and India.[194] The

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[191] Ibid., 27, 35.

[192] Griffiths, "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 82.

[193] As for the name of "the City of Prodigals," according to Cable and French's *Something Happened*, since Suzhou was on the trade road and the last town in China, there were various people coming from different places of the country. "They had reached the last town of China proper, and called a halt through sheer terror of the trackless Gobi beyond.....The prodigal has no nerve for loneliness, he prefers the crowd and the jazz of the market-place." See *Something Happened*, 138. Today's name of Suzhou is Jiuquan, meaning Spring of Wine.

[194] Griffiths, "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 83.

Gobi Desert spread over the broad area from the southern border of Xinjiang Province to Outer Mongolia, with thousands of people living in the oasis towns on its edge. All of these areas were virgin soil for Christianity and offered a limitless scope for pioneering evangelistic work.[195] With the help of Dr. Gao and his fellows, the Trio launched a mission station in Suzhou in November 1924, which became their base for itineration in the following years.

The launch of the mission had quite significant meaning. As pioneering missionaries in a city far from the CIM headquarters in Shanghai, the Trio enjoyed much more independence and more ministry of the mission. Not only did they carry out various activities for evangelism, but more importantly, they also authorized themselves to administer some activities that traditionally were taken by men. For instance, on December 28, 1924, Eva served communion to the twenty church members present that morning in Suzhou.[196] Since most Protestant missionaries still believed that only men should administer communion, Eva's behaviour could quite possibly lead to condemnation from their male colleagues. It might be one of reasons why Dr. King of the Lanzhou CIM visited Ganzhou early in 1925.[197] However, it turned out that even if there was condemnation from other missionaries it had no impact on the Trio's ministry. In fact, on Easter of 1925, Mildred took her turn at leading church services, with eleven people taking communion. And in the following years, Eva continued to administer communion and the Trio also baptized converts and preached the Gospel to both men and women.[198] Clearly, the full administration of the mission station provided an

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[195] Cable and French. *Something Happened,* 137.
[196] Platt, *Three Women*, 99.
[197] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 100.
[198] Platt, *Three Women*, 100, 102.

opportunity for the Trio to take on roles that had traditionally been played by male members. The fact that the Trio were competent at the work proved women's equal capabilities with men. Thus, the Trio used their actions to support their previous call for the equality of men and women in mission service and in mission organizations. Therefore, at this stage of the Trio's evangelism, their advocacy of and demands for women's equal rights were not just in verbal call but extended to be in practice. It was a milestone for the development of their feminist ideologies.

With the mission station built, the Trio made plans for their evangelistic work in Suzhou and nearby areas. Their plans divided the year into eight months of itineration and four months preaching in town.[199] During the winter, the Trio and volunteers from Ganzhou station would stay in Suzhou to conduct Bible classes, preach, sell literature, make house-to-house calls, and take care of the orphanage. Once winter was over, they would begin their itineration north and south of their station at Suzhou. Their travels ultimately covered the towns and villages and oases in northwest Gansu six times, which was an area nearly 350 miles long and 175 miles across.[200] Their wide travels made the Trio well known across the region, and many people would visit the inns where they stayed. Of this, Mildred and Francesca wrote that "being the first western women missionaries who had ever travelled by this road, our presence created quite a sensation, far more from the fact of our being women missionaries and unmarried, than by reason of our foreign nationality."[201] The well-known name undoubtedly helped to pave the way for their future itineration.

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[199] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 102.
[200] Griffiths, "The Ministry of Women in the China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship," 85.
[201] Mildred Cable, Francesca French and Evangeline French, "A Dispatch from Turkestan," *China's*

The Trio's first long-distance journey was their 1926 journey to Urumqi due to the via-Central-Asia route they chose to go back to England for furlough. However, the Trio took this trip as a good chance for preaching the Gospel in towns between Suzhou and Urumqi, where the last CIM station was located. It was an invaluable journey during which the Trio realised not only that they had much still to learn about Chinese Muslims but, more importantly, they also knew that those people scattered in the oases across the Gobi Desert should be their future objectives of itineration. Besides, as the first women missionaries to visit Urumqi, the Trio immediately realised the need for women's work there. Although there were two CIM missionaries in the city, George Hunter and Percy Mather, who had been working there for nineteen years and twelve years respectively, the evangelization of local women had been neglected. Therefore, after they returned to Suzhou from their furlough in 1929, they set their eyes on the oases along the old Silk Road across the Gobi Desert and these three women's evangelism was again mainly for women in this land.

Overall, the first three years of the Trio in northwestern China were mainly for laying a foundation and making exploration for future itineration. The Suzhou mission station's establishment was not just a base for the Trio's itineration but an arena that declared women missionaries' equality with men in the mission. In addition, they still held the belief in "women's work for women" and focused on preaching among women. Meanwhile, women being itinerant missionaries itself was a challenge to the traditional assumption of "women's disabilities." In the following years, the Trio proved their capabilities of itineration in the harsh and turbulent environment.

Millions, (February 1927): 22.

"Gossiping the Gospel" among Muslim Women of the Gobi Desert

As mentioned above, after their first travel across the Gobi Desert, the Trio became determined to bring Christianity to Muslims, especially Muslim women, in the widespread oases of the Gobi. Following that, the Trio took two more journeys across the Gobi. Most of the areas they covered were in eastern Xinjiang. Although two missionaries of the CIM—George Hunter and Percy Mather— had been working in the mission station of Urumqi for many years and travelled through wide areas of the province, Muslim women of the province had been neglected due to George Hunter's preference. In his biography, *George Hunter,* which was written by Mildred Cable and Francesca French, it indicated that Hunter thought it was wiser for him to avoid the issue of evangelism of women since he "never felt himself competent to judge in such a difficult matter" as "the reception of a woman to Church membership."[202] Meanwhile, according to the local tradition men were not allowed to enter women's quarters or even have direct contact with women. Thus, as women missionaries, the Trio were the first to undertake the task of evangelising local women of various ethnicities and went as far as possible to bring the Gospel to them during their itineration.

On the other hand, due to Muslim women's "upbringing and whole train of thought being entirely different from the heathen Chinese women,"[203] despite the Trio's twenty-year experience in the evangelization of Chinese women in Huozhou, dealing with Muslim women was a totally new experience. In their writings, the Trio summed up the difficulties they had met during the itineration as follow:

The spiritual equipment in faith, acumen, clarity of thought and power of expression,

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[202] Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *George Hunter* (London: China Inland Mission, 1948), 85.
[203] L. V. Soderstrom, "The Mohammedan Women of China," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 4, (January 1914): 79.

> required by one who would bring convincing force to bear upon the Moslem, is so far beyond the possibility of attainment by any human means, that the mere declaration of the difficulties of the task, baffles all powers of representation. Whether it be India, Africa, Arabia or Central Asia, the missionary to the Moslem is baulked by lack of results, and is called upon to make an act of faith quite other to that which is demanded of the missionary to the heathen. The same spiritual endowment is required by all who would pray effectively in this region, and 'who is sufficient for these things?[204]

The Trio, however, were as usual confident in taking this challenge. Regarding evangelism in the Islam-dominated area, Mildred had commented that:

> The Moslem has abrogated to himself all religious rites, leaving the women untaught and despised... (this) has created an opportunity for the Gospel in his own harem. Never did we fail of a cordial welcome and a great sphere awaits the woman missionary who will master the Turki language and move about these places.[205]

Besides, the Trio also thought that:

> The tragedy of the Moslem woman's life makes the opportunity for the Christian oman missionary to present the Gospel of spiritual liberation which she preaches.[206]

During their itineration on the treks or preaching in their base of Suzhou, the Trio had developed various methods to reach women as well as other people. After years of living in northwestern China and intense study, the Trio had mastered the Turkic language which was spoken by most people of the northwest. Then, with good methods, they could bring words of the Gospel to as many people as they could.

At the mission station of Suzhou, the Trio put up signs and posters to announce their arrival and planned activities to inspire people's curiosity and interest. At the same time, as the first women missionaries on the trek, the Trio themselves became instant news for any oasis they reached. The crowds gathered by this curiosity were always helpful to their preaching. Meanwhile, the Trio also had much concern for children.

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[204] French, Cable and French, *A Desert Journal*, 129-30.
[205] French, Cable and French, "A Dispatch from Turkestan," 22.
[206] Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Through Jade Gate and Central Asia, an account of journeys in Kansu, Turkestan and the Gobi desert* (London: Constable 1932), 258.

The mission provided accommodation for orphans during the winter months and served daily warm meals at the station. It was from among these children that Mildred adopted a Chinese deaf-and-dumb girl who was named Topsy. Her story was recorded in the Trio's book—*The Story of Topsy: Little Lonely of Central Asia.* The Trio's charity also affected people of Suzhou who began to change their attitudes toward those children.[207] Medical work was still a quite important component of the Trio's evangelism, both at the station and on the treks. A dispensary was set up at the station as one part of the evangelistic work. According to the Trio's writings, on many occasions their medical work helped them to approach Muslim women and provided a chance for preaching during their itineration. In their book *Desert Journal: Letters from Central Asia*, there was an instance displaying the friendship the Trio formed with a local woman named Mrs. Ma, who was the real authority of the household, as a result of Mildred Cable's medical skills. A connection was built between the Trio and the Muslim family. The Trio wrote in their book:

> The combination of our grey hairs, celibate state and pilgrim life, make a great appeal to her moral ideals, such a combination being elsewhere unknown to her experience. She treats us with every honour, and by her order the whole household does likewise.[208]

Meanwhile, the Trio had deep regards for this old Muslim lady, revealed in the words Cable used to describe her: "The virtuous woman of Proverbs is a true representation of this serious and exemplary Mother in Ishmael."[209] There are no words in the book indicating whether this long-standing friendship brought a result of

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[207] Platt, *Three Women*, 130.
[208] French, Cable and French, *Desert Journal,* 127.
[209] Ibid.

conversion or not, but the mutual respect in this friendship suggests that the difference of religious beliefs was not a hindrance to openness on both sides.[210]

Since most of the Muslim women the Trio met were illiterate, the Trio used the method they called "gossiping the Gospel."[211] When the Trio met Muslim women in a public place, the conversation between them could lead to an invitation to tea at home and an opportunity to talk about Christianity. Meantime, the Trio also used pictures to inspire people's interest and preach the Gospel. Due to the high percentage of illiteracy in the areas, "gossiping the Gospel" became the most important method of the Trio for preaching. Although it might not lead to conversion, at least it helped to bring words of Christianity to people in the Gobi for the first time.

On some occasions, a good relationship built with local Muslim leaders could lead to invitations from Muslim communities for home visiting and thus the chance to talk Muslim women in their quarters. As the Trio wrote in one book,

> Muslim women's quarters are not accessible to the Christian missionary, unless the Hand of God opens the door, but in the case of the Trio something had happened elsewhere which ensured a welcome for them among certain important merchants, and when the richest Ahung invited them to his house, all the lesser men followed suit till there were more homes open than they had time to enter. To the Trio it was a coveted privilege, for the burden of Muslim women had been heavy upon them, and there was no Christian woman missionary in any of these towns.[212]

But such occasions were rare. In many cases, the Trio needed to create the opportunities by themselves. Once they had the opportunity, they tried to preach Christianity. Distributing literature, which they brought with them every time on the trek, was also a good way to spread the Gospel. People on the old Silk Road could take

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[210] Linda Benson, "A Gobi Mission," in *The Missionary Kaleidoscope,* ed. by Lodwick and Cheng, 139.
[211] Benson, *Across China's Gobi,* 183.
[212] Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 278. The "something" that "had happened elsewhere" is unclear in the book.

that literature to places the Trio could not reach. In this way, Christianity was spread more widely than the Trio could think.

At most times, using these methods could provide the Trio access to Muslim women. Usually the Trio's revisiting could bring more opportunities for preaching. For instance, during the weeks they revisited Hami, they received "hundreds of callers, and it was difficult to get time to eat."[213] However, sometimes the methods did not work and the hostility of local Muslims was strong. Under such circumstances, the Trio just moved on or handled the situation with the help of local elders. To a certain extent, whether the Trio's methods worked or not depended on the good will and sympathy of local residents in the Gobi oases.

Consequently, as far as the Trio's itineration among women in the Islam-dominated area was concerned, achieving acceptance from Muslim women was what the Trio had to do first before gaining Muslim women's conversion. For Muslim women who were isolated in northwestern area of China, any information about the outside world, particularly information about women's lives outside their world, could bring these Muslim women a new view of their own lives. On the other hand, as pioneering missionaries, acceptance from Muslim women could give the Trio a chance to know more about Muslim women and their lives apart from the further possibility of preaching the Gospel. Thus, the agency of the Trio at this stage was more that of mediators for exchanging the information between the two cultures and laying a base for future work rather than converting Muslim women to Christianity.

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[213] French, Cable and French, *The Desert Journal*, 82.

"Sowing the Seed" instead of Conversion

As far as the conversion of Muslim women, who had become the focus of the Trio's ministry in northwestern China, was concerned, there was little information offered about it in their writings, which are the main resource for their evangelism in the northwest. Although they spent twelve years preaching throughout that Muslim-dominant area, only three converts are in their writings that are specifically recorded as Muslims. The typical representative of them was a Muslim woman who had been the first person to be baptised in Suzhou. Her story was recorded as follows in the Trio's books:

> There was the wife of an artisan, whose determination to be a Christian dated from the first time she heard the Gospel. A tall Muslim woman, whose face was scarred with lines of tragic experiences also came, heard the preaching, stood up in the midst and declared: 'Every word these women say is true.' From that hour she became a disciple. Many men and women came to service and listened gravely, and prodigals began to come to themselves and start home.[214]

It can be seen that this first conversion had a good influence on the interest of people in Suzhou in Christianity. As for the other two Muslim women converts, one was from Suzhou and the other was from the Trio's journey in the Gobi Desert. The former woman was the wife of a Muslim merchant who had become a Christian. Her husband's changed treatment of her left so deep of an impression on her that she converted to Christianity and joined the little church of Suzhou. The latter woman was baptised together with her Central Asian merchant husband when the Trio travelled across the desert and preached the Gospel among the Gobi people.[215] The small number of conversions in such a long period of work might make it seem that the Trio were less

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[214]Cable and French, *Something Happened*, 144.
[215] Platt, *Three Women*, 124, 161.

successful in their evangelism when compared with their achievements in Huozhou previously. But their writings indicate the great effort they put into the evangelization of the Muslim women of the northwest. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the reasons for this surprising result.

On the other hand, if we check other missionaries' accomplishments of evangelism in a similar evangelistic environment, it is not difficult to find out that small numbers of converts over long-term evangelism is a common phenomenon among missionaries working in the Muslim areas of northwestern China. George Hunter and Percy Mather were good examples of this. As the only missionaries working in so many parts of Xinjiang for quite a long time, they had only five baptised church members after fourteen years of work. Moreover, there were no woman converts and Hunter and Mather's reports did not indicate how many of those five converts had been Muslim before. Another well-known missionary working among Muslims of the northwest was George K. Harris of the CIM, who had worked in Qinghai Province for thirty-five years. And in one of his letters written to his prayer partners at home not long before his leave from China, he mentioned that there were several Muslims in Qinghai Province whom he knew had confessed faith in Christ, but they were "not yet prepared to pay the price of taking an open stand."[216] He did not give the exact number of Muslim converts, nor information on their gender. All of these missionaries were hard-working evangelists and devoted themselves to the evangelization of Muslims for many years. Therefore, this common result of evangelism only indicates that it was quite difficult for

[216] Malcolm R. Bradshaw, *Torch for Islam: A Biography of George K. Harris, Missionary to Muslims* (London: China Inland Mission Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1965), 106.

pioneering missionaries to make headway on the conversion of Muslims in the Muslim-dominated northwest of China.

Overall, considering the harsh conditions they were in on their evangelistic journey, the difficulties of the evangelization of Muslims were understandable. As far as the Trio's itinerant journey was concerned, the arduous environment of the desert was less challenging than the challenge of their evangelistic objective: Muslims, especially ethnic minority Muslims. In the writings of the Trio, instances of hostility towards them were not scarce. They were even stoned by Muslims when they were preaching the Gospel in a village of Xinjiang in spring of 1930.[217] Also, residents of northwestern China were scattered so widely that it always took several months before the Trio went to the same place again. Besides, due to wide distribution of people in the area, it was impossible to set up educational institutes or even classes for Bible study for nomadic people, and itinerant evangelism was the only way to bring Christianity to them. Furthermore, although the Trio had learnt Turkic and Arabic for their work, this was not enough for them to communicate with everyone they met on their evangelistic journey. Because some peoples spoke languages other than Turkic or Chinese, sometimes missionaries needed an interpreter to help them. But what they did most was distribute literature in the language spoken by the people they met, and let literature in those people's own languages become the medium of evangelism. Last but not the least was the persecution of the Muslim community towards those who had converted to Christianity. To a great extent this held back Muslims' interest in Christianity and missionaries' evangelism among Muslims. Therefore, even though the Trio and other

[217] Platt, *Three Women*, 172.

missionaries of the northwest had made great efforts on the evangelization of Muslims, the number of converts was far fewer than that in other parts of China.

However, sheer number of converts was not what the Trio pursued in their evangelism among Muslims of the northwest, nor did they take it as a standard for their success. To them, spreading the message of God as widely as they could was their most important duty. Being of the same view as Hudson Taylor, the Trio believed that "the work of a final conversion to Christianity could only be the work of God, and therefore this final challenge was left in His hands."[218] The great amount of work they had done on their itinerant journeys indicated their efforts toward this aim. For instance, in 1931 it was recorded in their writings that they had visited 2,700 homes, managed 665 meetings in the Gobi oases, and distributed thousands of religious tracts.[219] And it is needless to point out the number of people they had talked to and the area they covered in their twelve-year's itineration in the northwest. As pioneering missionaries in the Muslim-concentrated northwest of China, bringing the Gospel to these barren lands and sowing the seeds for those who would follow them was their belief in evangelism. As Francesca told the other two women: "Influence is a wonderful power" and "I suppose none of us realise the extent to which we influence other people—either for good or for evil," the spiritual influence of Christianity on the people of the northwest was what the Trio pursued in their itineration.[220] Consequently, compared with the number of converts, the "spiritual result" of the Trio's itinerant evangelism was much more significant.

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[218] Benson, "A Gobi Mission," in *The Missionary Kaleidoscope*, ed. Lodwick and Cheng, 144.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Phyllis Thompson, *Desert Pilgrim: The Story of Mildred Cable's Venture for God in Central Asia* (London: China Inland Mission Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1957), 60.

Conclusion

The Trio's last journey across the Gobi Desert was in 1936 when they came back to Suzhou from their furlough. Due to the growing amount of territory under the Chinese Communist Party's control in the northwest provinces of China since 1935, "all CIM stations in south Shaanxi were evacuated in May 1935 and Mr. Mann, CIM supervisor of Gansu, had withdrawn all of his missionaries from southern Gansu as well."[221] On August 25 of 1936, a sudden order came and ordered "All foreigners to leave Suchow immediately."[222] It was unclear that whether the order was issued by either the Chinese government or the British government or the local warlords. In the spring of 1937, the Trio traveled home to retirement.[223] After more than thirty years' evangelism in China, the Trio's mission was thus ended in 1936.

Clearly, when it comes to the evaluation of the Trio's achievement in their twelve-year evangelism in northwestern China, their efforts and courage, instead of the number of converts, are the foci. As discussed above, the Trio faced challenges from both the harsh desert environment and the hostile attitude of Muslims. Besides, northwestern China in the 1920s and 1930s was filled with rebellions and upheavals. Itinerating in such a turbulent environment needed great courage and outstanding intelligence.

The Trio's experience as prisoners of Gansu warlord Ma Zhongying during his rebellion indicated the danger of itineration in the turbulent northwest, and their successful escape demonstrated their courage and intelligence. When Gansu warlord General Ma Zhongying was wounded in the fighting in November of 1931, the Trio

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[221] *China's Millions*, May 1935, 85, cited in Benson, Across China's Gobi, 212.
[222] Platt, Three Women, 187.
[223] Ibid., 180-3,186-7.

were demanded to be conveyed to Ma's camp at Anxi and treat his wounds. The Trio "bowed to the inevitable" and began their four days' journey to meet Ma in company with "some two hundred press-ganged men also bound for the warlord's camp."[224] In Ma's camp, the Trio not only treated Ma's wounds, they also treated soldiers of Ma's army whose wounds had been caused by old-fashioned firearms.[225] When General Ma's wounds healed sufficiently, the Trio asked to be allowed to return to Dunhuang (the Trio had a house there) which was not permitted until the late winter of 1931 but with the requirement of remaining under his jurisdiction and the suggestion of coming when called upon either for Ma himself or for Ma's soldiers. On April 6, 1932, the Trio left their house at Dunhuang early and used the least travelled desert trails west toward Xinjiang where they believed they would be safe. With the threat of detection by Ma's men, they travelled for three weeks with little rest until they reached the town of Shanshan, near Turfan.[226]

Even though the Trio experienced various dangers either from the desert environment or from political turbulence, their itineration never stopped until the order came for them to leave. Therefore, although there were only a few converts, the Trio's efforts in the evangelization of people in northwestern China should not be ignored.

As we have seen, the Trio's agency during their itineration had been beyond evangelism. The itineration provided opportunities for them to be a medium between two different cultures. In their writings, the Trio conveyed the lives of Muslim women and other peoples of northwestern China, which were unknown to many westerners at the time. At most times, the Trio had a quite positive portrayal of minorities in the

[224] French, Cable, and French, *Something Happened*, 229.
[225] Platt, *Three Women*, 166.
[226] Benson, *Across China's Gobi*, 167-8.

northwest. The descriptions of minorities the Trio met were not limited to Muslims but also included Mongolians, Tibetans and others. They were described as hard-working and family-centred people. Besides, the Trio also showed their sensitivity and sympathy to the difficult lives of those women living in the desert oases. But at the same time, the Trio revealed their admiration for these minority women who faced their harsh circumstances with no fear and managed their lives and families with skills and fortitude. The positive images of Muslim women as well as other peoples in northwestern China obviously could help the Trio's readers to have a better understanding of lives on the other side of the earth.

Compared with their achievements of evangelical work in Huozhou station, that of the Trio's itineration in northwestern China was less visible. So was their contribution to improving status of Muslim women and other women in northwestern China. However, their attempts to administer Suzhou mission station and the influence of itineration both on local women in northwestern China and on the Trio themselves overshadowed the lack of convert numbers. Practicing full ministry of the Suzhou mission station publicly challenged the male-dominated mission societies. The Trio's determination of full administration of the station indicated the maturity of their feminist ideologies and signified the establishment of their feminist identities.

Also, while spreading Christianity in northwestern China, the Trio brought their life fulfillment to another level. As mentioned above, the Trio's celibate status and the missionary identity won much admiration from Muslim women. For Muslim women as well as other minority women of northwestern China at that time, the Trio set up a role model as independent "new women" of the twentieth century. Meantime, facing various

challenges during their itineration and conquering difficulties they met only helped the Trio to develop much more their potentialities and prove their prominent abilities. Thus, the Trio's journeys in northwestern China spread not only Christianity but also the idea of gender equality. In this way, the Trio transmitted the feminist ideologies to Muslim women as well as other women in the northwest of China. Furthermore, the experience of itinerating in far northwestern China helped to build up their noted names back in England and reach a status that they possibly would never obtain without it. Therefore, considering difficulties of evangelism and characteristics of itineration, evaluation of the Trio's achievements at this stage should be more counted on the potential influence of their communications with local women on the latter's lives and the fulfillment of the Trio's lives.

CONCLUSION

The Trio's retirement brought them into a new phase of their lives. Invitations to speak at meetings and work at missionary societies kept them busy in a different way. Their passion for evangelism was turned into a devotion to missionary advocacy. There were several outstanding interests for them: the China Inland Mission, which had sent them to China and fulfilled their evangelistic dreams in the Far East; the Salvation Army, which had been Eva's favourite for its social work; and the Bible Society, which kept on supplying them with Scriptures in different languages of Central Asia. The Second World War did not stop the Trio's passion for the Bible Society's world-wide work but made them aware of the importance of the Christian gospel in the "distressed and divided world." By then the Trio had become well-known as leaders of the Bible Society's circle of voluntary women workers in England and Wales: Eva was a member of the Committee of the CIM and Vice-President of the Zenana and Bible Medical Mission, Francesca was a member of the London Committee of the Indian Ludhiana College and Hospital and became President of the Girl Crusaders Union, and Mildred was on the Board of the Evangelical Union of South America and was Vice-President of the Bible Society in addition to being Chairman of its Women's Committee.[227] When the War ended the Trio were invited to travel abroad. They visited Australia, New Zealand, India and later South America, where they had remarkable popularity and found a widespread circulation of Scriptures and phenomenal growth of Evangelical Churches. There were also welcoming crowds wherever they appeared. It was not long after their journey to South America that the health of Mildred Cable declined. In 1952

[227] Ibid., 190, 193.

she died and the French sisters passed away eight years later within months of each other, ending the adventurous story of the Trio.[228]

Apart from their having won remarkable names as women missionaries with rich and successful evangelism experience, the books on their travels turned them into well-known writers as well. In addition to their busy lives for the missionary advocacy, writing books on their travels in Central Asia and evangelism was also an important part of Mildred and Francesca's daily activities. Their books on the Gobi Desert and western China became bestsellers in their day and remain an important contribution to the history of the region. Moreover, they were awarded the Livingston and Lawrence Medals, and were received by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.[229] With their great achievements and their own lives, the Trio indicated the possibility of fulfilment of women's potential in evangelism and as professionals.

To sum up the Trio's lives, they provide a clear image of womanhood that had appeared since the end of the nineteenth century, the image of the "New Woman,"[230] and a nationally valuable exemplar on equal terms with men. As did many young women in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, the Trio threw off the traditional idea of middle-class single women and stepped out of their homes to pursue an independent life as professionals. But what made the Trio stand out from most of these women is that not only did they dedicate their lives to overseas evangelism in circumstances that even men could hardly deal with, but also with their great achievements in so many fields they actually demonstrated the right of working women

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[228] Linda Benson, "Missionaries with Attitude: A Women's Mission in Northwestern China," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (October 2005): 183-8.
[229] Ibid. 186.
[230] Rowbotham, "'Soldiers of Christ'? Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Gender & History*, 102.

to "demand judgement of their performance in parity with their male counterparts."[231] Whether as evangelists preaching the Gospel in the Huozhou station or as itinerant missionaries in northwestern China, the Trio exerted themselves to spreading God's words with their fullest effort. With their utmost devotion, the Huozhou station recovered from the damages of the Boxer Rising quickly and in a few years grew to become an evangelical centre with institutions, a medical dispensary and a church. Furthermore, years of itinerant journeys along the old Silk Road in northwestern China displayed their great courage and determination of bringing the Gospel to all barren lands in spite of facing various danger and challenges such as the harsh desert weather, attacks from Muslims, being imprisoned by brigands, etc. Compared with contemporary male missionaries in the same areas and regardless of the number of converts, the Trio fully demonstrated that women were just as capable of being missionaries as men, but what's more important is that the Trio's performance in their itinerant journeys shows their superiority in evangelism as women missionaries.

While their outstanding performance won the Trio noted names as prominent missionaries, they indicated another identity during their evangelistic career as well—feminists. Although the Trio never claimed they were feminists or got involved in any feminist campaigns in Britain, their ideology on gender equality and their efforts toward the improvement of women's role in mission organizations demonstrated characteristics of feminism. During their evangelistic work, the Trio consistently focused on women's work. Besides, the Trio had built a positive image of Chinese women for the western world. Furthermore, the Trio themselves also obtained self-liberation and provided an example of single women succeeding in traditionally male-dominated positions for

[231] Ibid., 102.

British women. The Trio's evangelistic work in China was aimed at the liberation of Chinese women in Huozhou and Muslim women of northwestern China physically as well as ideologically. Additionally, the Trio's work as overseas missionaries allowed them to do medical services and work as evangelists and teachers, careers that were not always available to women back home in England. The aim of helping to free women in foreign lands in fact could help the Trio themselves, as well as other women missionaries, to realize their own need to be emancipated from traditional Victorian ideology. As Wollstonecraft wrote in 1792: "Let an enlightened nation then try… allowing them [women] to share the advantages of education and government with men, see whether they will become better, as they grow wiser and become free,"[232] the Trio and most other women missionaries took advantage of the opportunities the mission field provided to fulfill their potential.

As far as the Trio were concerned and from what has been discussed above, the Trio proved their superior abilities in many fields with remarkable achievements, which earned them well-known names as pioneering missionaries, writers, public speakers and fearless Silk Road travelers. With their outstanding accomplishments and well-known names, the Trio could speak out for change for women both in overseas mission fields and in homeland mission service. Their lives and achievements thus well symbolize women's competent capability of succeeding in traditionally male-dominated careers, at least in the mission field.

At the same time, not only did the Trio demonstrate a new image of successful women in a traditionally male-dominated profession, but also they set up new images of

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[232] "On National Education," in Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, chapter 12, paragraph 41, cited in Karen E. Smith, "Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission," 40, *Baptist History and Heritage,* Vol. 41, No. 1, (Winter 2006): 30-41.

women in China for their contemporaries. As discussed above, the Trio had a quite positive description of Chinese women and Muslim women in northwestern China as hard-working, family-centered people, facing a hard life with fortitude, who were pursuing a better life just as all other people in the world. With no doubt, the Trio's positive and sympathetic descriptions of women's lives in China could help their readers to have a more objective knowledge of Chinese women when many other writings about Chinese women were full of miserable stories and were characterized by the assumptions about the inferiority of Eastern women. The Trio's capabilities of objective observation put them ahead of most of their contemporaries.

However, as British missionaries in China in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was indisputable that the Trio carried some characteristics of the era. Although the Trio could have quite a positive perspective on women's lives in China, as did many of their contemporaries, their sense of superiority as British women was revealed in their writings when they judged Chinese lives and Chinese women's status with British standards. In addition, as advocates for their own evangelistic work in China, sometimes the Trio tended to overlook the influence of factors other than their own efforts on their evangelistic achievements, such as the increasing student numbers in the Huozhou schools. Emphasizing the effect of their evangelistic work on Chinese people obviously could win more supporters in England and back up their culturally superior assumption to some extent.

Overall, the Trio's identities as feminists were overshadowed by the glamour of their most known one—missionaries. But their life stories indicated their being feminists was an undeniable fact. The liberation they pursued for was not only for other

women either in China or in mission societies but also for the Trio themselves. Either by claiming independence from their upper middle-class family or by their decision to become itinerant evangelists in far northwestern China, the Trio demonstrated their consistent determination to obtain fulfillment in their lives. With their achievements, the Trio had set up a role model for their followers in the mission as well as other women at the time. Whether the Trio were regarded as Feminists or missionaries, without their tight bond under the same goal and firm faith, they could hardly have reached the status they had obtained. Individually, each of them had special talents. Together, three women became the "Trio" and left their remarkable prints in history.

CHRONOLOGY

1869	Evangeline French was born.
1871	Francesca French was born.
1878	Mildred Cable was born on February 21.
1893	Eva French began her China service in Shanxi.
1896	Eva French was granted her junior missionary certification.
1899	Mildred Cable was enrolled in the China Inland Mission's formal training program.
1900	Due to the Boxer Rising in China, Eva French went back England for a year's furlough.
1901	The Huozhou station re-opened. Mildred Cable arrived in China in February and joined Eva French at the Huozhou station, Shanxi province in the summer.
1902	Mildred Cable and Eva French expanded the Huozhou Girls' School.
1904	Mildred Cable was granted junior missionary certification.
1907	Mildred Cable received her senior missionary certification.
1908	Mildred Cable and Eva French returned to England due to the death of Eva's mother.
1909	Francesca French joined her sister Eva French and Mildred Cable and went to China with them. The Two became The Trio.
1911	Francesca French received her junior missionary certification.
1917	*The Fulfillment of a Dream of Pastor His: The Story of the Work in Hwochow* was published, authored by Mildred Cable.
1918-1921	The Trio left for their furlough.
1922	The Trio submitted the request for leaving for western China.
1923	The Trio left Huozhou and began their first long journey into

	northwestern China on June 11.
1924	The Trio got to the town of Ganzhou, Gansu Province in early spring.
1925	The Trio arrived Suzhou, Gansu Province on October 13.
1926	The Trio left for their furlough on June 11.
1928	Mildred Cable gave a presentation at a joint meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society and the Central Asian Society on February 15.
1928	The Trio back China on August 25.
1928	The Trio adopted Topsy on Christmas Eve.
1929	The Trio traveled to Xinjiang's provincial capital, Urumqi, at the end of October and studied Turki there during the winter.
1931	Trio were kept in Warlord Ma Zhongying's camp to heal his wound from November to December.
1932-1934	The Trio went back in England for furlough.
1935	*Ambassadors for Christ* was published.
1936	The Trio returned to England.
1937	*The Story of Topsy: Little Lonely of Central Asia* was published, authored by Mildred Cable and Francesca French.
1942	*The Gobi Desert* was first published.
1943	The Trio were awarded the Livingstone Medal in December.
1946	*The Book with Demands a Verdict* was published, authored by Mildred Cable and Francesca French.
1947	*The Bible in Mission Lands* was published, authored by Mildred Cable and Francesca French.
1948	*The Spark and Flame* was published.
1952	Mildred Cable died.

1952	*Why Not for the World? The Story of the Work of God through the Bible Society* was published, authored by Mildred Cable and Francesca French.
1960	Eva and Francesca died within weeks of each other.
1998	Eileen Gai (Topsy) died.

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE PLACE NAMES

Pinyin	Other Forms	Characters
Anxi	Ansi	安西
Beijing	Peking	北京
Dunhuang	Tunhuang	敦煌
Gansu	Kansu	甘肃
Ganzhou	Kanchow Today's Zhangye	甘州 （今：张掖）
Gebi shamo	Gobi Desert	戈壁沙漠
Hami	Qumul, Kumul	哈密
Hankou	Hankow	汉口
Hebei	Hepei	河北
Hetian	Khotan	和田
Huozhou	Hwochow	霍州
Jiayuguan	Chia-yu-kuan	嘉峪关

Lanzhou	Lanchow	兰州
Qinghai		青海
Shanghai		上海
Sanshan	Pichan, Piqan	鄯善
Shanxi	Shensi	山西
Shaanxi	Shansi	陕西
Suzhou	City of Prodigals Today's Jiuquan	肃州 （今：酒泉）
Taiyuan	Taiyuan	太原
Tulufan	Turfan	吐鲁番
Wulumqi	Urumqi, Urumchi	乌鲁木齐
Xi'an	Sian	西安
Xi'ning	Sining	西宁
Xinjiang	Sinkiang, East Turkestan	新疆

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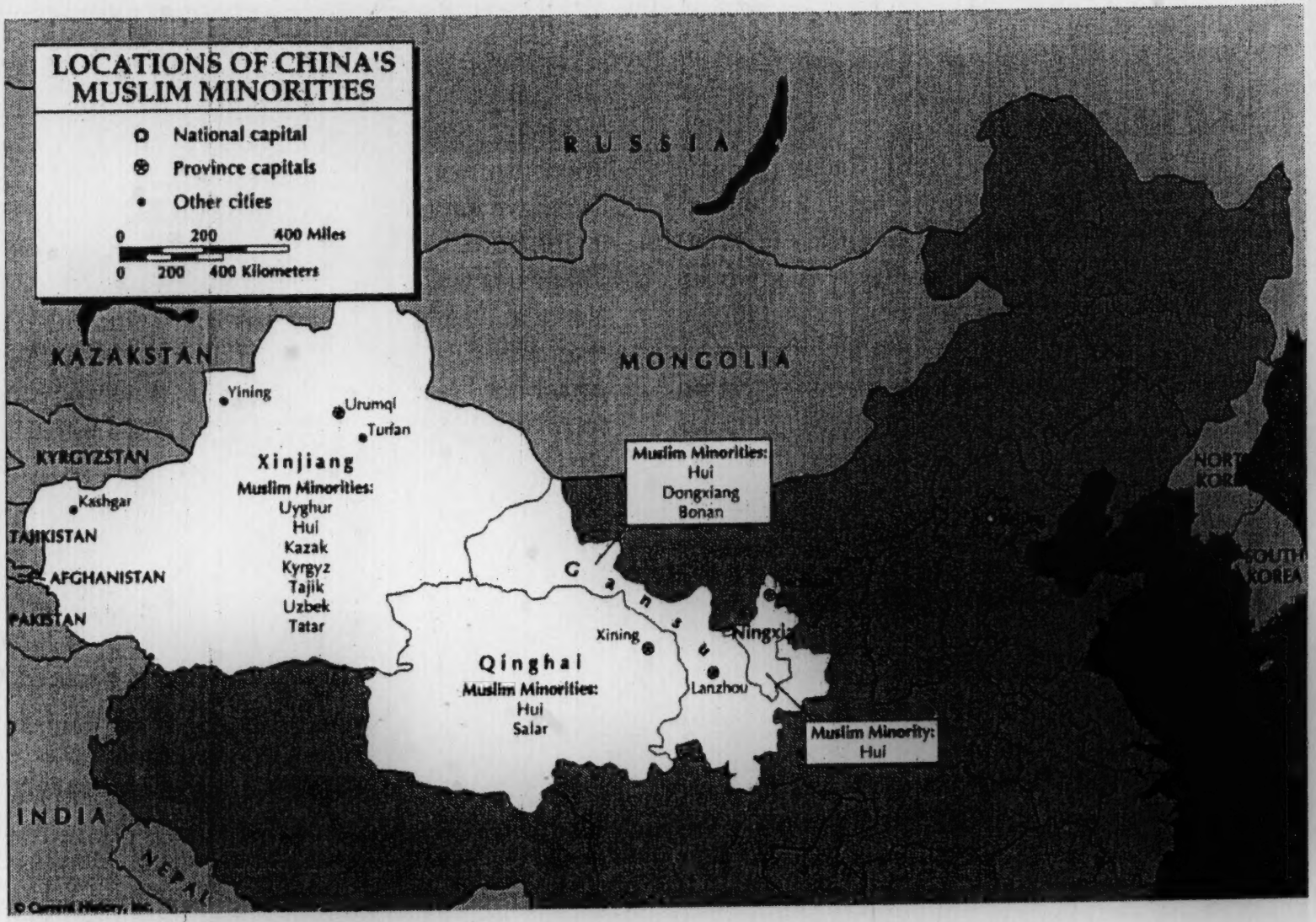
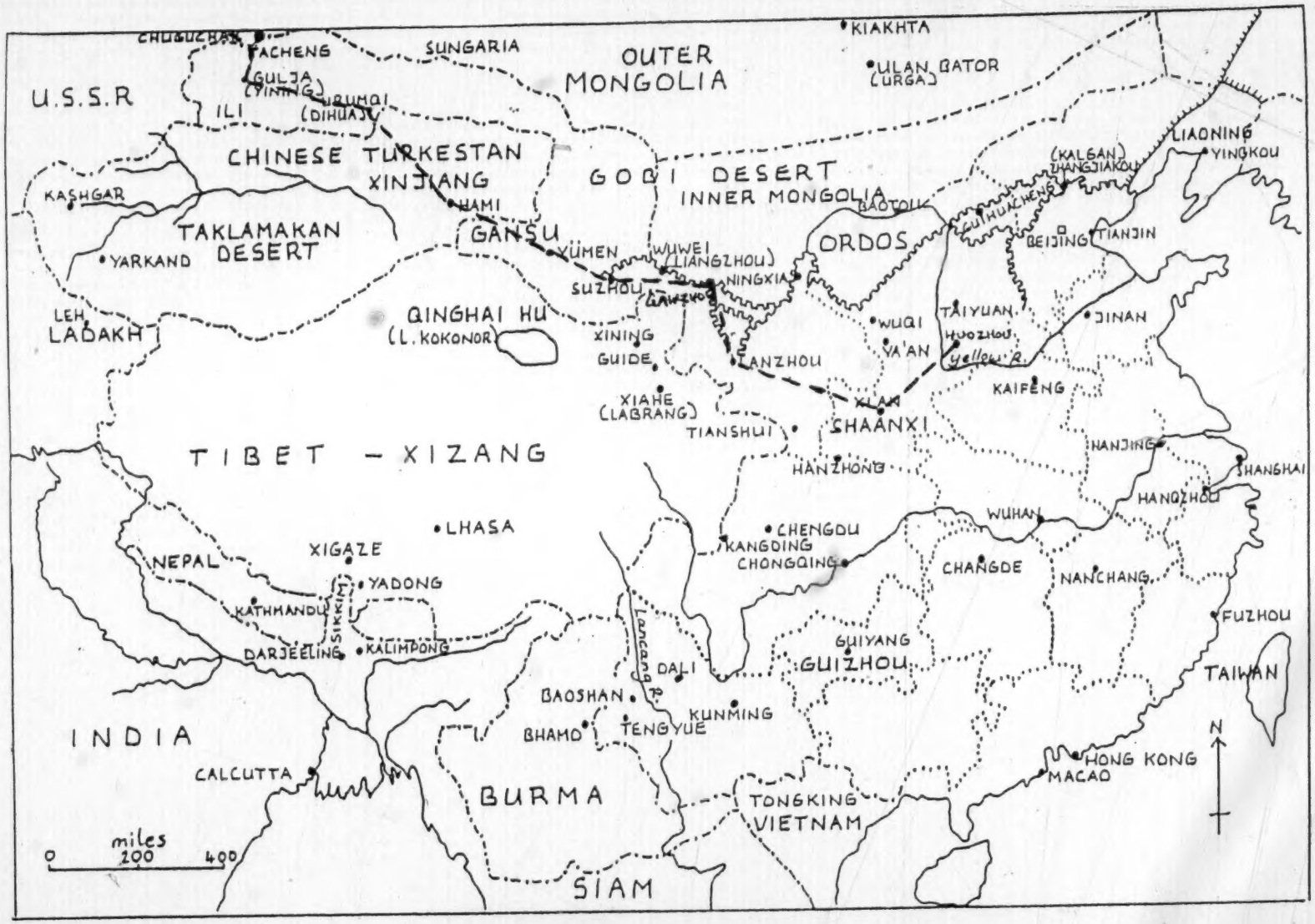
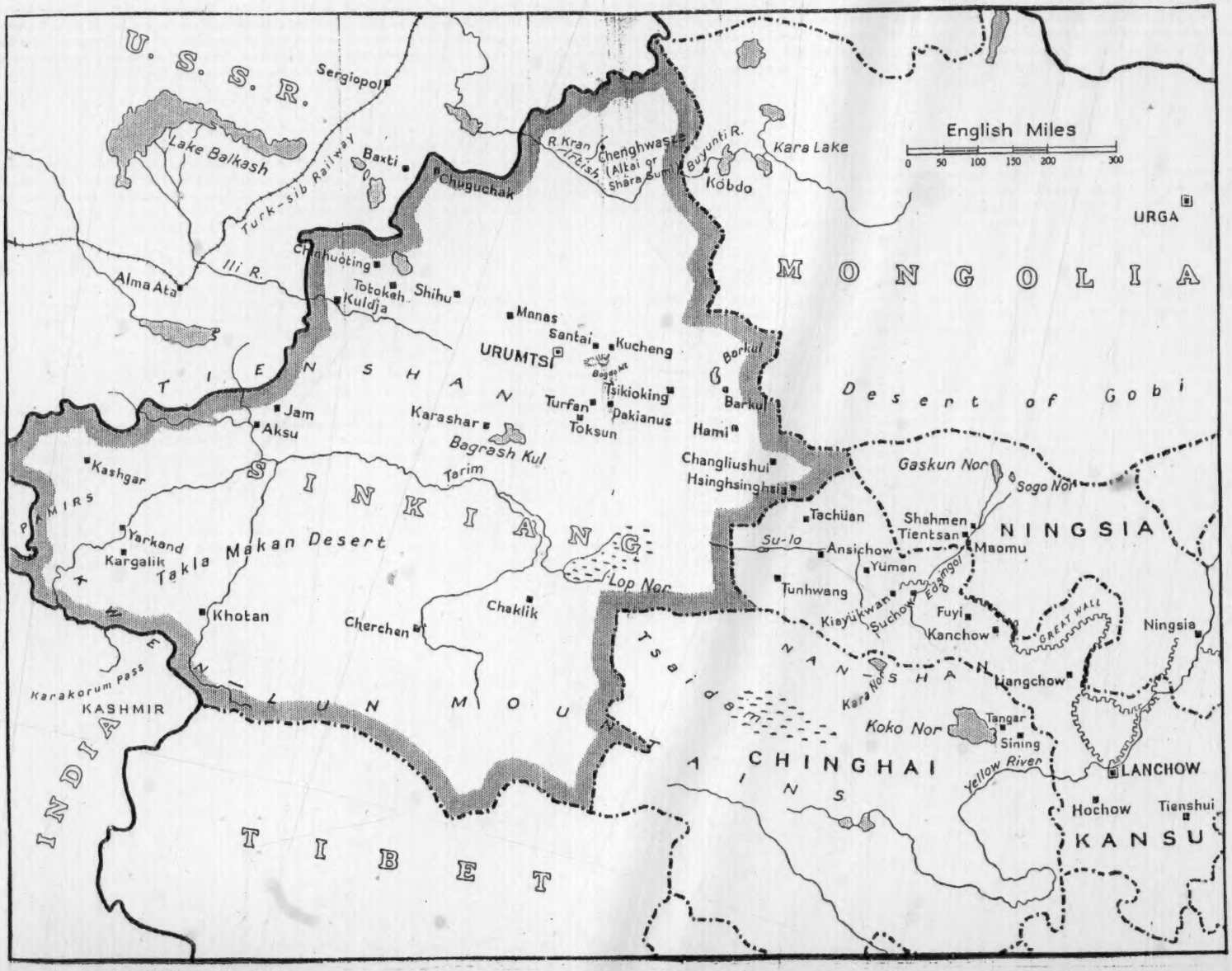


Map of Northwest China



EXTREMITIES OF THE EMPIRE JOURNEY OF THE TRIO



Map of Xinjiang